

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE GIFT OF PROPHECY IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

by

Keith P. Bohley

While prophecy is the most often named and most fully explained spiritual gift in the New Testament, it is seldom recognized or used in the United Methodist Church today. The purpose of this project was to study the gift of prophecy in three United Methodist churches where it is regularly utilized. Utilizing an open-ended interview format, this qualitative study sought to find trends, protocols, and procedures concerning the use of prophecy. The results of this research clearly show the gift of prophecy to be functioning effectively within certain United Methodist churches.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by  
Keith P. Bohley

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## CHAPTER 1

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that the last days, which had been ushered in by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, would be a time when “your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Acts 2:17). Later Paul would encourage believers to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy” (1 Cor. 14:1).

Nevertheless, throughout Church history, no spiritual gift has been more neglected and misunderstood than the gift of prophecy. Some have simply equated it with preaching; others have maintained it went out of existence after the apostolic period. Yet in the last thirty years, the presence of this gift, defined in terms both of forth-telling and foretelling, a revelation received from God, is being felt more profoundly than in any time since the apostolic period. God is revealing himself in significant ways, and if the Church is to be complete, it must come to grips with prophetic ministry.

Graham Houston quotes a joke from the repertoire of the late English comedian Tommy Cooper in which he states, “A man walked into a bar and said ouch—it was an iron bar” (13). The Church seems to be walking into the bar of prophecy, and it will either enjoy the refreshment of the Spirit or bang its head in rejection of what God is doing. Even though Christians stumble over terminology and disagree about the function and practice of prophecy, God’s promises will be fulfilled: In the last days, God’s sons and daughters *will* prophesy.

Many problems remain to be solved. Some are theological and others more philosophical. Peter’s interpretation of the Joel passage in Acts 2:18, by adding “and they will prophesy,” and Paul’s listing of prophecy in his discussion of the gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4 place prophecy in the center of the New Testament

Church. Peter's announcement that because God had poured out his Spirit on all peoples they would prophesy, and Paul's statements about prophecy clearly demonstrate that the gift was not only for the New Testament church but is an ongoing pneumatological phenomenon. The theological issues center on the prophetic role in the New Testament Church as a continuation of the Old Testament prophetic function and the institutionalizing of the New Testament prophetic office (Witherington 33). The relationship between Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles must also be determined. A theological bridge from Old Testament prophets to New Testament apostles must be built in order for the gift of prophecy to continue in the Church today.

Another aspect of the problem is practical. The charismatic gifts are generally neglected in seminary. Without training or background, most pastors are ill prepared to deal with the gifts God gives to his people, particularly when these gifts are not a part of the pastor's gift mix. A second practical issue lies with the power structure of the Church. Conflicts can easily occur when someone other than the pastor regularly receives a word from the Lord. Submission to pastoral authority becomes a crucial element in the utilization of the prophetic gift. The recognition and utilization of this gift thus has strong ecclesiological implications (Davis 24). For instance, the use of prophecy has the potential to alter the structure and order of worship. In fact, so strong are the opinions around the gift of prophecy that "questions about the nature of this gift threaten to become, if they have not done so already, a major storm center in New Testament theology and church worship" (Farnell, "The Current Debate about New Testament Prophecy" 277). Another practical concern is the fear of the disruption to orderly worship for sometimes the Holy Spirit moves in ways that do not appear orderly.

While acceptance of the gift of prophecy has been a problem, the United

Methodist Church does provide the background and theological framework for the use of this gift. It has long been a part of its heritage, but many reasons exist for its lack of use. One of the major stumbling blocks, however, is a simple lack of understanding of what is meant by the gift of prophecy. “Prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation” (Grudem, Are Miraculous Gifts 7). Even with this simple definition, difficulties within the Church arise often because of differing understandings and identification of that revelation.

Wayne A. Grudem, editor of the book Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? has identified four theological positions in regard to the gift of prophecy. These four views are cessationist, Charismatic/Pentecostal churches, third wave, and an open but cautious position. Each of these has had an impact on United Methodist theology.

The first of these views, the cessationist view, maintains that the miraculous gifts, including the gift of prophecy, ceased at the end of the apostolic era. While this view is not Wesleyan, it nevertheless has had a strong impact on Methodist polity and doctrine. A great deal of writing that has impacted the United Methodist Church during the twentieth century has been written from this theological position. Much of the modern thought in this area has its roots in the works of the late nineteenth century theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield. In his books Miracles: Yesterday and Today True and False and Counterfeit Miracles, Warfield argues that miracles ended with the apostolic age. His work established itself most firmly in reformed theology and set the stage for the great debate between those who believe that miraculous signs and wonders, along with the full range of the gifts, are available today and those who believe they are not.

In present literature John F. MacArthur, Jr. champions the cessationist cause. MacArthur states, “Nothing in scripture indicates that the miracles of the apostolic age

were meant to be continuous in subsequent ages” (141). MacArthur, citing heavily from Warfield, states, “The charismatics believe that spectacular miraculous gifts were given for the edification of believers. Does God’s Word support such a conclusion?” (141). He answers his own question with a resounding no. The cessationist position rests mainly on the argument that the miraculous signs for today are done satanically or in error in order to build up or boost those who perform them. MacArthur states, “Satanic imitations and deceptions bear a real threat to the church” (184).

The second view Grudem identifies is that of the charismatic and Pentecostal groups. These groups are combined together because of their basic belief in a second work of grace, called Spirit baptism, which is accompanied by speaking in tongues. This group is open to the full range of the gifts, and through these two groups much development in the gift of prophecy has taken place. The fact that these groups find their heritage in Wesleyan theological thought is interesting (Are Miraculous Gifts 11).

The third theological view that Grudem identifies is held by third wave churches. C. Peter Wagner labeled these churches in his book The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit. Wagner simply takes the Pentecostal movement beginning in 1900 as the first wave and the charismatic movement in the 1960s as the second and identifies the Spirit movement beginning in the 1980s as the third. “The Third Wave is a new moving of the Holy Spirit among evangelicals who, for one reason or another, have chosen not to identify with either the Pentecostals or the charismatic” (18). Grudem includes this group because of their receptivity to the gifts of the Spirit while maintaining a more open view in regard to Spirit baptism and a softer view of the use of tongues as evidence of that baptism (Are Miraculous Gifts 11-12). This group is having a strong impact on the Church, and, while independent by nature, their influence is being felt across denominational lines (Banister;

Nathan and Wilson).

The fourth view is that of the open but cautious group. This group is open to receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit but do not see them at work within their churches. Grudem says, “They are open to the possibility of miraculous gifts today, but they are concerned about the possibility of abuses that they have seen in groups that practice these gifts” (Are Miraculous Gifts 12-13). Many in the United Methodist Church find themselves in this position. I would add a subgroup to this open but cautious group and call it open but ignorant. An openness to accept the gift of prophecy exists from the denomination’s Wesleyan heritage, but because the gift is not modeled within church life, it is not operationalized.

As an example of open but ignorant, early in my ministry God began to reveal to me things that, except for divine revelation, I would have no way of knowing. A parishioner would be concerned that he or she would be facing cancer, and during prayer I would have the revelation that cancer was not present. On another occasion, I was counseling a woman in a difficult marriage. During the session she was preoccupied with the difficulties that she and her husband were having in purchasing a home. The Spirit revealed to me in the midst of the session that they would be able to purchase the home and gave me the exact amount they would pay. I asked her not to tell her husband but simply to let God work it out. She went home and immediately told her husband. Following some lengthy negotiations they settled on a price other than the one I had mentioned. Jim, her husband, quickly drew attention to the discrepancy in the price. Two days later the owner called to discuss changes in the carpet, which affected the price. The selling price was the amount God had revealed to me. While these illustrations fit more clearly into a definition of a word of knowledge, they do show clear evidence of God’s



divine revelation. Because I had no theological framework in which to place these kinds of experiences, I simply labeled them as “how God speaks to Christians.” While that statement is accurate, I have now come to understand these types of revelations as part of the gifts God gives to the Church. The intent of this research is to help others develop a more clear understanding of the gift of prophecy and thereby broaden its effective utilization throughout United Methodism.

### **Biblical/Theological Foundation**

Prophecy’s theological foundation is based on Paul’s understanding of spiritual gifts as part of the Church, the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-28). Prophecy is the only gift listed in all four of what are considered the major gift chapters including Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. Through these chapters Paul makes it clear that each person may have one or more spiritual gifts with the ability to exercise them according to the grace given them. For Paul, the Church would not be complete if all the gifts were not present, just as the body is incomplete when parts are missing. Being Christian was to be charismatic and embrace all Spiritual gifts. “The broad sweep of charismatic endowment, for Paul, embraced every aspect of life” (Schatzmann 51). In Ephesians 4:8, Paul, quoting from Psalms 68, writes concerning Christ, “When he ascended on high he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” Paul continues on in verse 11 and lists some of these gifts. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph. 4:11-12). Placing the gifts squarely within the Church, Paul identifies the purpose of these gifts or offices as building people up and preparing them for works of service. In 1 Corinthians 14, he then demonstrates how prophecy as one of these gifts is

to function in building up the church.

Spiritual gifts are special abilities God gives for the building up of the church. These gifts are given by the Holy Spirit according to the will of God. All believers receive the Holy Spirit, who is the giver of every spiritual gift. Christ's final instructions to the disciples was, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4). Spiritual gifts then are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit functioning in the life of the believer activates particular gifts according to the Spirit's will. "The impartation of spiritual gifts is not dependent upon performance or pressure from men" (Randolph 26). While each believer has at least one gift others are added as needed. While the believer may follow Paul's advice to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:30) and "be eager to prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:39), the addition of these gifts is at the will of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts can be strengthened with use or may become inactive if ignored or not kept active by the Spirit. Because the spiritual gift is manifested by the Gift, the Holy Spirit, manifestations will take place regardless of the vessel. Immature believers can manifest spiritual gifts, which is why more emphasis must be placed on the fruits of the Spirit than the gifts of the Spirit.

Using 1 Corinthians 13 as an umbrella under which all the spiritual gifts should function, Paul launches into chapter 14 with these words: "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (1 Cor. 14:1). Here Paul is outlining his purpose for the gift of prophecy. While the prophet is to prepare the Church for works of service, prophecy itself, whether by the prophet or others, is to strengthen, encourage, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). In 1 Corinthians 13:10 Paul identifies that the gifts,

which are all imperfect, will disappear when the perfect comes. Until the return of Christ, spiritual gifts including prophecy will remain. The Church then becomes a place for “growth and edification of its members into Christ and into a common life through their God-given ministry to one another (1 Cor. 14:12, 19, 26)” (Banks 90).

Prophecy, then, in combination with the other gifts, is essential for the maturation of the Church. Prophecy is not only for strengthening, encouraging, and comforting the believers but also for outreach. Paul indicates as the gift functions in the life of the Church, prophecy convinces the unbeliever that “God is really among you!” (1 Cor. 23-25). Paul clearly identifies prophecy as one of the ongoing gifts of the Church, but he must also deal with the potential for misuse. Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 5: 19-20, “We should not put out the spirit’s fire. Do not treat prophecy with contempt. Test everything, hold on to the good, and avoid every kind of evil.” Paul’s admonition reinforces his teachings on the conduct of worship in 1 Corinthians 14 where prophecy is open to the discernment of those who are gathered. While God’s Spirit is active and alive in public worship, Paul understands that order must be maintained within the life of the gathered community. His problem with the gift of tongues concerns this very issue. Paul allows for prophets to speak within the life of the Church, but that must be done in an orderly fashion and then weighed by those who are gathered (1 Cor. 14:29).

Prophecy is at no time out of control. Paul goes on to say, “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:32-33a). Paul’s desire is that God reveal his will for the Church through the prophet in an orderly way. In this manner as hearts are revealed and the Church is edified, not only will the community of believers grow but it will deliver a convicting message to the unbeliever.

According to Paul, prophecy consists of essentially four elements. C. Samuel Storm outlines these as revelation, perception or reception, interpretation, and application (207). The revelation is always infallible because God gives it. Occasionally incomplete messages are given. Several of the Old Testament prophets wrote concerning things that were to come that simply did not make sense to the prophet. The message given, nevertheless, was infallible. The second element suggests that perception or reception is the responsibility of the prophet. The reception could come in the form of a voice, a vision, a dream, or a thought placed in the mind. The function of prophecy is to communicate a “revelation from God as a spontaneous utterance” (Schatzmann 22). The prophet should share what is received at the appropriate time. The person “who exercises the gift of prophecy should speak only when conscious of his words as inspired, and presumably only for as long as he is confident that God is speaking through him” (Hill 119).

The next phase is the interpretation of what is received. Those who are gathered must weigh what is said. In a general discussion of this point, Gordon D. Fee says, “Because of their sense of awe over God’s speaking in this way, spontaneously and often in an authoritative kind of voice, Pentecostals have traditionally let almost anything go among them in the name of the Lord” (172). Since all believers have the presence of the Spirit, the gathered community will sense if correction is necessary, and the unity of the gathered under the Spirit will give interpretation to what has been received.

The fourth element, application of prophecy, takes place as the body of believers responds to the prophetic word. God often reveals to his people things that he wants them to do, but the choice of whether or not to take action always remains with the people. Israel’s blatant disregard of the prophetic warnings amply illustrates the point. The

accuracy of the prophet was often recognized by historical evidence rather than contemporary action.

The United Methodist Church has a well-defined framework that allows for the utilization of the prophetic gift. The 1988 General Conference resolved the issue of doctrinal standards. They consist of the Articles of Religion, the Confession of Faith, and Wesley's sermons and Explanatory Notes on the New Testament (Abraham 44). While these doctrinal standards create the boundaries to do theological reflection, additional guidance for practical theology is developed in what has become known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral. "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith is revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason" (Olson 77). The quadrilateral is a tool in developing doctrine and theology, and it is also useful as a tool for understanding and judging prophecy. The Quadrilateral, however, does not mean equilateral. Scripture must always remain primary. When judging prophecy it must first fit with the authority of Scripture. Any violation of God's revealed word would automatically be false prophecy. Therefore, Scripture is always normative. Once the test of Scripture is passed, tradition, experience, and reason come to play in judging prophecies. None of these becomes proof alone, but a combination of the three becomes a framework to help the body judge prophecy. By using the quadrilateral, the United Methodist Church has been given the vehicle that makes the weighing and judging of prophecies within the life of the Church attainable. Certainly for all prophecy, the word and the testimony of the Holy Spirit become the final test.

Grant R. Osborne, in developing the hermeneutical spiral, adds community to his approach and substitutes philosophy for reason. He states, "These five components—Scripture, tradition, community, experience, philosophy—together influence one's

choices in the production of theological covering models that can explicate the divinely inspired truths of the Word of God for our day” (298). Osborne is developing a pattern to provide application to God’s Word revealed in Scripture. Like the quadrilateral, when applied appropriately, the addition of community becomes helpful in judging God’s revealed word in prophecy. What must be clearly and repeatedly stated is that God’s Word revealed in prophecy today is not equal to Scripture. The canon of Scripture has been closed.

Evangelicals believe the Word of God to be complete. Developing theology and direction for the Church, however, is not done without other influences coming to bear. “No matter how seriously the church may take the authority of the Bible, the slogan *sola Scriptura* is both conceptually and practically untenable, because the interpretation of Scripture can never occur in a vacuum” (Hays 209). Peter demonstrates practical application in Acts 2 as he interprets the events of Pentecost in light of the Joel Scripture. In this passage he quotes Joel in saying, “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days,” and then he adds, “And they will prophesy” (Acts 2:18). Under the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter understands the Joel passage in light of the present revelation and understands prophecy is for all. Therefore, using Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason as tools in the community of believers is useful not only in developing theological perspective, but United Methodists can also employ this procedure in weighing prophecy.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the gift of prophecy functions and is pastored in United Methodist churches where it is already recognized and affirmed. The gift of prophecy functions openly and effectively in some United Methodist churches.

The intent of this project is to examine how the gift is functioning in several of these churches with a view toward helping more United Methodist churches use the gift of prophecy for the deepening of spiritual life in their congregations. While many individuals in United Methodist churches have the gift of prophecy, the gift is often unrecognized and, as a result, underutilized. By examining healthy churches that recognize and teach on the gift of prophecy, my intent is to establish prophecy as a gift used in all ages of church history and particularly as one that is compatible with Wesleyan theology. Over the last twenty years, prophecy has been restored as a prominent gift across the Church, the body of believers. This paper will in part help to educate United Methodists so those who have been given this gift by God will find ways that it may be nurtured and used. During a prayer time after a congregational reflection group, the Lord gave this word to one of the members: “A church without a prophet is like a person with one eye. It has no depth perception” (Kirkpatrick). Prophecy adds the element of depth perception to the life of the Church.

### **Research Questions**

Three primary questions guide this study.

#### **Research Question 1**

How do the churches in this study understand the nature and purpose of the prophetic gift?

#### **Research Question 2**

How does the prophetic gift function in these churches?

#### **Research Question 3**

How are the prophetically gifted in these churches validated and held accountable?

### **Definition of Terms**

In simplest terms, *prophecy* is knowledge God gives to the prophetically gifted individual that is then spoken for edification, information, and instruction. This knowledge could not have been known by natural means and is generally given through a word, dream, vision, or other promptings of the Holy Spirit. While every Christian may speak directly with the Father, and prophecies are at times given to those without the gift of prophecy, God uses the gift of prophecy to grant a clearer picture of things as they are and of things to come.

*Revelatory or word gifts* are a part of prophecy and include tongues and their interpretation, the word of wisdom, and the word of knowledge. These gifts may appear differently in various spiritual gift inventories but are understood here to be information given by the Spirit. This information may come in the form of a Scripture verse, a phrase, or a thought. Word of wisdom reveals how to use the word of knowledge and thus functions in the interpretation phase. While some offer a different definition of the word of knowledge and word of wisdom, for the purpose of this research they are defined as part of the revelatory gifts (Keener 115-16; Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts* 230-31). Throughout the paper the term prophecy will be used for any form of recognized and acknowledged revelatory gift.

### **Methodology**

This research was an exploratory study utilizing semi-structured interviews. The interviews included the pastor, those who function with the prophetic gift, and other active church members. Interviews were conducted in person and taped to provide a verbatim record.



## **Subjects**

The interview population consisted of ten members of each of three pre-selected United Methodist churches. These churches were selected for their active ongoing use of the prophetic gift. I contacted by phone each of the pastors asking permission to use their church as a part of this project. A follow-up letter was sent giving background information on the project and the basic questions I would be asking during the interviews. I asked the pastors to seek out volunteers and help to arrange the interviews. Those asked to participate were people who had demonstrated the gift within the life of the church, those who had given and/or received a prophecy, or who have participated in settings where prophecy was used. The pastor of each church was interviewed. The other twenty-seven subjects were pre-selected by the pastors. These are identified respectively as the pastor, prophet, participant, and parishioner.

## **Instrumentation**

Interviewing members of the churches in this study was necessary in order to gain insight into the research questions. The opportunity to hear personal stories gave insight into various prophetic activities in the life of the church. A researcher-designed semi-structured interview was used to gather this information. Background information was obtained on each individual, and a series of questions with follow-up probes guided an approximately forty-five minute personal interview. A pilot test of the questions was performed in order to test the strength of the questions and the length of the interview as well as giving myself experience in conducting the interview.

## **Data Collection**

Names of United Methodist churches who actively participate in prophecy were obtained from Aldersgate Renewal Ministries (ARM). This organization is a Holy Spirit

renewal group within the United Methodist Church. Location and willingness also became a part of the selection process. Churches of various size and location, city, rural, etc., were sought to give a broader overview of this gift across the denomination. Arrangements for interviews were accomplished with the help of the pastor. Volunteers were sought and interviews were set over a two-day period. I then arranged to conduct personal, face-to-face interviews with each participant. Using the interview format, questions were asked with follow-up probes. The use of probes allowed me to gain insight into the faith journey of each person interviewed and discern patterns in those with the gift of prophecy. Probes were also used to allow the interviewees to tell their stories including times when they had received or were given prophecy that strengthened or hurt their prophetic understanding.

### **Delimitation and Generalizability**

While many in the United Methodist churches understand the gift of prophecy, it is not widely recognized and openly used in congregational life. Only those churches that make intentional use of prophecy were selected for this study. Because of the history of the United Methodist Church, the gifts of the Spirit are generally accepted; however, United Methodists have generally been quiet regarding the gifts of the Spirit and are currently experiencing a lack of use. The gift of prophecy is not actively utilized throughout the denomination. By providing insight into how the gift is used in three churches, this research hopes to broaden the understanding and use of prophecy in other United Methodist churches.

### **Overview**

In Chapter 2, selected literature pertinent to this study is reviewed. By tracing the gift of prophecy from the early Church to the present, an ongoing review of the gift is

presented. This review sets the gift of prophecy not only in its biblical context but places it firmly in theological/historical context. Reviewing the Methodist quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason demonstrates a practical framework for the continued use of the gift of prophecy.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation regarding the design of the study, the research method, and the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the research material. Chapter 5 reports the major findings and the practical application for this research throughout the United Methodist Church.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with Scripture, exploring the role of prophecy first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament. From there I look at the continuation of the prophetic gift from the first century Church to the present day. In each section a review of the literature shows evidence of continuous use. What will be seen is that the gift was not only present throughout Church history but also demonstrates a developmental progression. The twentieth century has been called the century of the Holy Spirit (Synan, Century of the Holy Spirit IX). More active in some periods than others, more has been written in the last ten to fifteen years than in any previous time. The impact of this gift has been felt within the United Methodist Church. While few Methodist churches officially recognize the gift of prophecy, the prophetic awareness throughout the denomination is increasing. This review places that awareness on firm ground both theologically and historically.

#### Prophecy in the Old Testament

The Hebrew language uses three words for prophet: *roeh*, *hozeh*, and *nabi*. While *roeh* and *hozeh* are generally translated into English as seer, all three words are used in the Old Testament to describe a prophet. According to Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger, III, *roeh* occurs twelve times and is always translated as “seer” (912-13). *Hozeh* occurs seventeen times; sixteen times it is translated as the word “seer” and once as “prophet.” *Nabi* is used 316 times and is translated 302 times as “prophet or prophets.” *Nabi*, then, is one who announces or declares and is literally a spokesperson or a herald. While these are the words most commonly used, the Scriptures do not seem to distinguish between the different designations. “*Nabi* describes the prophet objectively as the

spokesman for the message, whereas *roeh* and *hozeh* refer to that same person subjectively as a seer or visionary who receives the message in a pictorial mode of revelation” (Gentile 43).

Although the difference between the role of seer and that of prophet is unclear, it may be in how the individuals received the message and how they communicated it. What is clear is that the *nabi* (prophet) was authorized to speak for another. The prophet was the mouthpiece for the words given. Aaron was told to speak the very words Moses gave him. “He [Aaron] will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him” (Exod. 4:16). Then the Lord said to Moses, “See I have made you like a God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet [*nabi*]” (Exod. 7:1).

Throughout the Old Testament, God would speak to the people through the prophets. They were individuals, both men and women, who took the calling and authority granted to them seriously. In fact, they did not merely speak for God; they spoke the very words of God. In Exodus 4:12, God calls Moses saying, “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” In Jeremiah 1:9 the prophet writes, “Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me,... ‘Now, I have put my words in your mouth.’” God also spoke to Ezekiel saying, “You must speak my words to them” (Ezek. 2:7). The Old Testament prophets’ authority rested in the reliability of their prophecy. Grudem writes, “The authority of God’s messengers, the prophets, was not limited to the general content or just the main idea of their message. Rather, they claimed repeatedly that their very words were words which God had given them to deliver” (Gift of Prophecy 36). If the prophecies did not come true, they would have been branded false prophets. “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of Lord does

not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22). So aware of these circumstances was Balaam, who is the epitome of the false prophet, that when he responds to Balak he says, “But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts into my mouth” (Num. 22:38). The prophet depended upon God and was judged by the complete accuracy of the prophetic statement. With regard to prophetic accuracy, Grudem states, “So what we find in the Old Testament is that every prophet is judged or evaluated, but not the various parts of every prophecy” (24). The proof text in the Old Testament was the prophet. If the prophet was a true prophet, everything he spoke for God would be true. Trust was an absolute essential. No system for sorting and weighing was in place.

As God established the nation of Israel, he used the prophet as the human governing voice. The law was granted through Moses and the government through Samuel. While God used the prophets as governing instruments, their function as the mouthpiece of God had a much more far-reaching effect. “In the case of the Old Testament prophets, their messages were largely the proclamation of the divine purposes of salvation and glory to be accomplished in the future” (Vine, Unger, and White 493).

While prophecy had a predictive nature to it, that was not the primary purpose in the Old Testament. Usually the prophet was speaking forth God’s voice with the intent of giving direction to the people. The prophetic word was a human extension of God’s sovereign will as rightful ruler. The relationship established with the prophet allowed God to have direct contact with the people; however, the predictive or foretelling part of prophecy is miraculous in nature. Some have indicated that as much as one-fourth of the Bible text has to do with the future (Gentile 48).

Without trust that God was speaking through the prophet, much of the Scripture can be called into question. God was establishing his nation in the midst of the pagan world where divination and magic were common. For these reasons the qualifications for those who could prophesy were strict:

Each prophet 1) would be an Israelite, 2) would speak in the name of the Lord, 3) would be authenticated by predications that came true, and 4) would deliver a message in harmony with written revelation. Anyone claiming to have a message from God but not meeting these tests was a false prophet and could be safely ignored. (Brown 35)

In Deuteronomy 18 Moses establishes the institution of the prophets. God will raise up prophets to lead the nation with the ultimate culmination coming in Christ.

While God called prophets and accuracy was their validation, the nation of Israel often found itself following the ways of the world. When Israel wanted a king, God spoke to Samuel saying, “It is not you they have rejected; but they have rejected me as their king” (1 Sam. 8:7). God chose the prophets, but their acceptance by the people was another matter. With Malachi ends the period of the writing prophets and begins what is considered the four hundred silent years. The last representatives of the period were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. While these four hundred years represent a break in God’s activity recorded in Scripture, it does not signal a cessation of all prophetic activity. As David E. Aune states, “Israelite prophecy did not disappear. Rather, like all religious and social institutions, it underwent a number of far-reaching and even radical changes during the period of the second temple (516 B.C. to A.D. 70)” (130).

### **Prophecy in the New Testament**

The prophets in both the Old and New Testaments were alike in that they were spokespersons for God. Nevertheless, with the completed work of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God’s prophetic work would undergo significant change. David Hill

states, “The concept of prophecy in the New Testament is identical with that of the Major Prophets of Israel under the old covenant.... When we come to the function of prophecy however, there is a major difference” (242). John the Baptist is a transitional figure. He represents an awakening of the prophetic voice at the onset of the New Testament. Coming in the spirit of Elijah, he points to the Christ and the coming of the “kingdom of heaven.” That call brought, in part, fulfillment to the Old Testament prophetic role and places the New Testament prophet squarely in the body life of the kingdom, the Church. The role of the New Testament prophet, like that of the Old Testament, was one of forth-telling and foretelling. As Gentile states, the prophet was “one who speaks forth or is openly, a proclaimer of a divine message” (493). While the Old Testament prophet was to give direction to the nation of Israel, calling them out of the world, the New Testament prophet would bring edification to the Church. Like their Old Testament counterparts, they proclaimed the message of salvation while bringing edification to the believers. “The gospel writers all indicated that John the Baptist was a genuine prophet who stood in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets” (Green and McKnight 639). People saw Jesus as a prophet in this same tradition. “The Gospels make it clear that the masses saw in the words and actions of Jesus convincing evidence that he was a prophet” (640). Jesus likely saw himself as fulfilling the prophetic role. Aune states, “The evidence, though slim, does suggest that Jesus regarded himself as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition. And in the framework of current Jewish expectation, he must have thought of himself as an eschatological prophet” (187).

The quoting of the Joel passage in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost demonstrates the fuller implications of the ongoing prophetic activity. When Peter states, “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream



dreams” (Acts 2:17), he places the gift of prophecy squarely within the kingdom John had proclaimed. The Holy Spirit is now an abiding presence in each believer. With the outpouring of the Spirit, believers are given gifts including prophecy. The gift will now function for the edification of the believers within the Church. In the Old Testament, the Spirit endowed select men and women to fulfill certain official functions in the theocracy. Because of its connections to an office, the Spirit could be taken away. In the new covenant, the Spirit involves a permanent indwelling within all God’s people (Ladd 295-96).

Grudem has done extensive work in the area of prophecy and essentially delineates two types of New Testament prophecy. He places the apostles in the line of the Old Testament prophets as writers of Scripture. In this way he is able to protect the Scriptures from error. Grudem then allows for a second group, the New Testament prophets of which Paul speaks, who must have their prophecy tested for error:

A fresh examination of the New Testament teaching on this gift would show that it should be defined not as “predicting the future” nor as “proclaiming a word from the Lord,” nor as “powerful preaching”—but rather as “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.” (Systematic Theology 1049)

In this way, prophets whose words were used for Scripture were separated from prophets whose prophecy must be tested by the body of believers. In his book The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, Grudem makes the argument that the New Testament prophets should not be compared to the Old Testament prophets. Evidence indicates that the Old Testament prophets spoke and wrote the very words of God, and while some would argue that all Old Testament Scripture was written by those who were called prophets, the New Testament prophet does not fill that same role:

It is not surprising, then, that when we read the New Testament we find several times when the Apostles are connected with the Old Testament

prophets, but New Testament prophets, by contrast are never connected with Old Testament prophets in the same way. (28)

If as Grudem suggests a relationship exists between the apostles of the New Testament and the prophets of the Old Testament, a problem still remains. By solving the problem of the continuation of prophecy, by equating Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, a second problem is created with “two forms of New Testament prophecy: nonauthoritative congregational prophecy and authoritative (i.e., apostolic) prophecy” (Farnell, “Current Debate” 281). Along with two forms of prophecy, two forms of apostles exist: the apostles who wrote Scripture, and are thus prophets, and the gift of apostle Paul acknowledges in Ephesians. Grudem’s solution is a renaming of the apostles so that they were the same as the Old Testament prophets. Grudem grants to these apostles/prophets the authority to write Scripture. Individuals with the gift of prophecy would then function without the need for 100 percent accuracy and open themselves to review of the congregation.

F. David Farnell, along with others, spends considerable time in disputing Grudem’s theory. Using Joel 2 and Acts 2, Farnell establishes continuity between the Old and New Testament. He concludes, “New Testament prophets and prophecy stood in direct line with their Old Testament counterparts who proclaimed God’s message and God’s will to God’s people. Therefore New Testament prophecy is fundamentally a development and continuation of Old Testament prophecy” (“Gift of Prophecy” 393). By maintaining a direct relationship between Old and New Testament prophets, Farnell and other cessationists can allow for prophecy to go no farther than the New Testament Church. These cessationists contend that New and Old Testament prophets are alike in their ability to speak the very word of God without error. Since the prophetic gift in the Church today is not deemed to be without error, cessationists use proof texts to show that

prophecy ended with the apostolic church.

A third line of reasoning presents itself when attempting to maintain the continuation of the voice of prophecy from the Old to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, figures such as Moses and Samuel not only spoke the words of God to the nation of Israel but were also seen as God's authority figures. In the theocracy God gave leadership to the nation of Israel through these chosen vessels. The theocracy was challenged under Samuel as the nation of Israel expressed their desire for a king. From this point on, the nation was led by a king, while the priests dealt with issues of the temple and the prophets spoke God's warning and direction. Through these prophets God spoke forth the directive message for both temporal and spiritual life. The office of prophet, priest, and king were brought together in Christ and given to the Church in the gifts of apostle, pastor, and prophet. With the coming of the Holy Spirit and the launching of the Church, the gifts of apostle, prophet, and pastor fulfilled the leadership positions for the expansion and maturing of the body of believers. As the Old Testament functioned with prophet, priest, and king, so the new Israel, the Church, functions with the apostle, prophet, and pastor. These offices continue to be necessary, then, as they bring structure to the body. Only when these gifts or offices work cooperatively, however, will the Church function as God intends.

The argument for continuation of the Old Testament prophet also centers on the issues of infallibility. The Old Testament prophets heard the very words of God. Their strength lay in the fact that the people understood that their prophecy was the word of God, and they were judged by their ability to make no mistakes. Jeremiah's statement that a prophet will be recognized "as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true" (Jer. 29:9) is evidence that the nation of Israel, just like the New Testament

Church, was charged with discernment in the matters of prophecy. In fact many of the prophecies that were given were not understood by either the prophet or those who heard the prophecy. The strength of those prophecies was discerned by the nation of Israel by the strength of the Spirit on the prophet. Scripture records some Old Testament prophets who made minor discrepancies or errors in their prophecy. As Moses strikes the rock in Numbers 20 rather than speak to the rock, God is displeased. God was clear in his instructions to Moses, but Moses' humanity interrupted the prophetic flow. The end result was that water came forth from the rock, but the details of how it should happen were not in keeping with God's word.

A second illustration of potential Old Testament prophet misunderstanding is the prophet Jonah. God seems to have been very clear in his instructions to Jonah. He is to prophesy that after forty more days Nineveh will be overturned. While no further instructions are given, Nineveh repents and Jonah's prophetic word is overturned. Scripture does not imply that Jonah misunderstood or misquoted the word of God, but it does speak to the conditional nature of prophecy. In fact, years later God's Spirit would give full validation to the prophecies included in Scripture. In the New Testament, the type of errors and minor details that surround the Agabus prophecy in Acts (the way Paul was bound and who actually turned him over to authorities) appear similar to the kinds of issues that seem to have existed with Old Testament prophets.

The argument for the continuation of the prophetic office then exists in three areas. First, while God's word is 100 percent accurate, the transmission and interpretation of God's word is not. Secondly, as the Church is established post-Pentecost, the opportunity exists for all to hear and speak the direct word of God. Robert G. Tuttle states in his book The Partakers, "The gift of prophecy has been granted by God to the entire

body of Christ” (82). Instead of a few prophets speaking to a nation, God has exponentially multiplied his prophets to expand, direct, and build up the Church. The human factor that would allow for error has also increased. The gift or office, however, is the same. The canon of Scripture was closed for protection against error.

Thirdly, the apostolic office was created as a leadership position in the New Testament Church. The apostles were the key figures in launching the Church. As a result of their direct connection to Christ and their recording of his deeds, God used them for the completion of Scripture. If they are termed apostles who were prophets makes little difference because the uniqueness of their position made the case for the authority of their writings. One of the tests for the measurement of Scripture rested in apostolic origin. The gift of apostle is a leadership gift. Like the apostles, those with this gift are used in leadership positions. As with all New Testament Christians, they may also function with the prophetic gift as God gives them his Word. As will be seen with Paul, both the gift of apostle and prophet were at work, but because of the need for authority, Paul claims the former as his office.

The recognition of the apostolic gift or office was seen as a continuation of the Old Testament prophetic office, which granted authority to write Scriptures but was established as a leadership position. The New Testament prophetic office becomes, then, like the Old Testament one, granting edification, correction, and direction for the Church as God speaks.

### **Paul**

Paul speaks to the Church out of his background as an apostle and a prophet and establishes the gift of prophecy in the gift mix. In 1 Corinthians 13:37 he states, “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am

writing to you is the Lord's command." Obviously Paul is speaking to those who, being spiritually gifted, would recognize his authority as an apostle. While in the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians and elsewhere, Paul gives an extensive teaching on the need and use of the gift of prophecy, Ben Witherington, III illustrates that Paul does not use the gift of prophecy as the means by which God is speaking through him:

On the issue of the office of prophet, Paul has little to say. He seems strangely reluctant to use the term *prophetes* as a way of characterizing who he is and what his role is in his church. This contrasts dramatically with his use of the term "apostle." This reluctance is understandable when we recognize that New Testament prophets did not have the same status, standing, or unquestioned authority as some of the Old Testament prophets. Rather, there is evidence from Paul suggesting that the utterances of Christian prophets needed to be weighed, since it was possible for their prophecy, in the enthusiasm of the moment of revelation, to exceed the proportion of their faith and understanding. (316)

Paul states that "Two or three prophets should speak and the others should weigh carefully what is said" (1 Cor. 14:29). With the expansion of the gift of prophecy, careful weighing of the life of the Church was necessary. Paul recognized the need within the Church to validate the prophet just as the nation of Israel was to test the prophet by the accuracy of the prophecy:

This is why it is prophecy (rather than some other gift) which Paul calls a sign to believers. The distinctiveness of prophecy is that it must be based on revelation, and revelation, as it functions in prophecy, is always something that, Paul thinks, comes spontaneously and comes only from God. (Grudem, Gift of Prophecy 153)

Paul in dealing with prophecy places the use of the gift in corporate worship. He gives directions for its use in 1 Corinthians 14. The fact that prophecy would be given in an orderly manner and weighed by the believers present would be far different from the methods used by the Old Testament prophets. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:32, "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." This passage indicates that unlike the Old Testament prophet to whom God

gave a word that was to be spoken directly to the people, the gift of prophecy should be used within the life of the Church and under the control of the prophet. Prophecy must be discerned first by the prophet and then judged for accuracy by the gathered faith community. Paul then places the use, with checks and balances, within the body of believers. While he may have exercised this gift, it did not carry the same authority as his apostolic writings. Paul seems to be validating through his writings that authority existed in those who were with Jesus, a fact that Paul uses to his advantage. While he grants to the developing churches the gift of apostle and prophet, the function and strength of the gifts will vary.

W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr. state, “With the completion of the canon of scripture, prophecy apparently passed away, 1 Cor. 13:8-9. In his measure the teacher has taken the place of the prophet” (492). This interpretation seems to be far removed from Paul’s intent. That Paul would have written that some would be given the gift of teaching and some would be given the gift of prophecy, etc., if these were, in fact, meant to be the same thing seems illogical. If Paul’s authority to divine apostleship grants him abilities to write Scripture, and trust rests in the authority of Scripture, then the gift of prophecy must be seen as an ongoing gift.

### **The Gift in Paul’s Life**

In Acts 21:4, Paul is warned through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. In Acts 21:10-11, Agabus prophesied that the Jews of Jerusalem would bind Paul. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, Paul tells the Thessalonians, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.” Jack Deere indicates that every chapter in the book of Acts except chapter seventeen has a reference to “supernatural revelatory communication from God” (Surprised by the Voice 53-54).

The gift of prophecy or the ministry of prophecy was alive and well in the New Testament Church as seen in these illustrations.

Paul discusses spiritual gifts in four main places in his letters: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and Ephesians 4:11. Prophecy is the only gift that is mentioned in all four of these chapters. In fact, Paul gives special attention to the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:1, 6, 22, and in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. However prophecy is defined, this gift was important to Paul and important for imparting the knowledge of this gift to the Church.

Paul's own understanding of the gift of prophecy may well have come early in his ministry. The book of Acts records that he was blinded on the Damascus Road and then regained his sight from Ananias who received a vision to go to Paul and give him a word from the Lord:

Ananias, described by the writer of Luke-Acts simply as a "disciple" who lived in Damascus, is seldom, if ever, acknowledged as a prophetic figure. Two things suggest, however, that the role he played with respect to Saul was, indeed, a prophetic one. First, it is said that the Lord spoke to him in a vision providing specific instructions for him to go to Saul (Acts 9:10-16). Second, Ananias went to Saul and gave him this message: "The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" Acts 9:17. (Hawthorne and Martin 755)

In 1 Timothy 1:18, Paul says, "I give you instructions in keeping with prophecies once made about you so that by following them you may fight the good fight." Paul also received a personal prophecy in Acts 13:1-3 when prophets came down and set aside Paul and Barnabas for missionary service. These passages demonstrate that Paul saw this gift to be active in his own life, active in the life of the Church, and as one of the spiritual gifts that was given for the edification and growth of the Church. Paul gives special instructions concerning its use and then commends it to his brothers saying, "Therefore,



my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39).

The fact that prophecy played a significant part in Paul’s life personally is evident from Paul’s call on the Damascus road and from prophecies given to him about his pending imprisonment. His refusal to heed these warnings of imprisonment reveals Paul understands the role of prophecy in relationship to his own understanding of the leading of the Spirit.

Clearly, Paul believes the gift of prophecy is basic for the edification and leadership of the Church. In the letters of Paul including Thessalonians, Timothy, Corinthians, and Romans, he states that this gift was for the New Testament Church. Evidence that the gift is no longer needed does not exist, only that it should be handled properly and in good order.

### **Prophecy in the Post-Apostolic Church**

Throughout the remainder of the book of Acts, prophetic activity abounded in establishing the Church. As Paul planted churches, spiritual gifts including prophecy were part of the formula for establishing church structure. The body of Christ, however, is a living organism, and change would take place over time and distance from the first church plants. Political and sociological change within the Church that reflected the worldview made for a steady decline of prophetic activity from the close of the apostolic era until the reformation:

Prophecy and apocalyptic appear to have declined in early Christianity for a variety of reasons. Association with a (heretical) movement, the challenge it brought to the growing institutional authoritative structure of the church, the prominence it gave to women and their role in the church, the assumed challenge that the living voice of prophecy offered to accepted sacred traditions, led to the gradual decline, though not to the death, of prophecy in early Christianity. (Witherington 396-97)

During the next three hundred years, the Church would enter a time focused on a

need for survival. Church structure would emerge and become established. The canon of Scripture was closed. Earl E. Cairns states, “To the authoritative bond in the bishop and to the authoritative belief of the creed, the canon, a listing of volumes belonging to an authoritative book, came as a re-enforcement” (118). During this time a natural development of power occurred within the Church. Because of that development and the fear of heresies, which were prominent, miracles and particularly prophecies became few and far between. Through the institutionalization of the Church, the power was moved from the anointed laity to the episcopacy.

A shift in structure, the canonization of Scripture, and a dramatic decline in prophetic activity indicated that revelation through prophecy was over. Ernest B. Gentile, however, refutes this contention:

Some have said that formation of canon occurred because the time of revelation was past, but this idea has been thoroughly challenged by those who have studied the period, showing that prophecy and spiritual gifts were still functioning in the church. (256)

A number of documents exist from this time period that makes reference to the spiritual gifts and rules for the use of prophecy. One of these documents is the Didache, “a manual of church instruction ... most likely composed before the middle of the second century” (Cairns 77). Among other directions to the Church were rules about true and false prophets. The Didache states in part, “[B]ut not everyone that speaketh in spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the way of the Lord. Therefore by their ways, shall be known the false prophet and the prophet” (qtd. in Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church 65). Prophets would wander from one Didache community to another and were in some ways treated like early Methodist circuit riders. They were fed and cared for. As Aaron Melavec states, “One notices that the Didache community made ample provision for welcoming prophets but gave not attention whatsoever to creating them and sending them

out” (76). The communities claim to have dealt with false prophets though no tests were given aside from the behavior of the prophet. Warnings about counterfeits are given as the Didache 3.4 states, “My child, do not become a diviner, since this is the path leading to idolatry; nor an enchanter, nor an astrologer, nor a purifier, nor [even] wish to see these things, for, from all these, idolatry is begotten” (Melavec 9).

In these communities prophecy was beginning to steadily decline, possibly due to restriction and misuse. Clayton N. Jefford states, “In contrast to Paul’s attitude, which sees charismatic gifts as potentially available to all members of the community,... the Didache sees the possession of charism of prophecy as limited to a specific group” (297). As Vinson Synan notes in the article on “2000 Years of Prophecy,” “Indeed, in that period prophets were seen as little more than wandering medicine men” (24). For these and other reasons, prophecy continued to decline.

Gentile creates a graph of various works and writings from the first three centuries. These sources indicate the continued use of the gift of prophecy during this period (252). The use of these gifts was to be relatively short-lived. “The prophetic movement had gradually become a movement with the occasional prophetic voice, and finally, by at least the time of Constantine if not before, changed into an established institutionalized religion” (Witherington 397).

The change that took place in the years following the apostolic church is what Bill Hamon identifies in The Eternal Church as the “transition of the church from spiritual to structural” (87). Constantine made Christianity the state religion during this period and ultimately created the schism between East and West. Church structure seems to have more to do with the lack of the Holy Spirit’s power than a theological position, which saw prophecy and miracles ending with the apostolic church. Deere states, “If the gifts

were lost in history, the most important question is not whether they were lost, but why they were lost” (Surprised by the Power 73). Whether the gift of prophecy was withheld by God during this period or the Church was no longer in a position to utilize the gift makes little difference. The continued presence of the gift, even if only occasionally, provides evidence of the continuation:

In the second century of the Christian era, it appears that some, if not most, of the roles of the prophet were taken over by figures such as the monarchical bishop. Eschatology further faded in the second and third centuries. It became increasingly easy to do, and one must surely see the Monastic movement as a sort of last strong prophetic eschatological challenge to a church settling down for a long winter’s nap. (Witherington 403)

The Church’s struggle with structure and theology would not end when equal status was afforded Christians by Constantine. The Church quickly passed from the persecuted to the controlled as an official religion of the Roman Empire. The next twelve hundred years would see much in the development of theology, but structure and order in absence of the Scripture put the Church to sleep. While efforts were made to restrict Bible reading, the problem seemed to stem less from that restriction than from its interpretation by the “Fathers, the teachers, and the council of the church” (Walker 296). How revelation in the form of prophecies could be restricted is easy to see. The authority for understanding Scripture was vested in structure rather than in the hearts of humans.

While teachers such as Aquinas would dot the theological landscape, the ultimate authority for understanding God was the Church. Aquinas would agree that reason was inadequate and that reason must be augmented by revelation. Aquinas and others would agree, however, that revelation as contained in the Scriptures was the final authority. This final authority was understood to be “in light of the interpretations of the councils and the fathers-in a word, as comprehended by the church” (Walker 246). When a word

was given, it was often foretelling some future event. The prophecies of Nostradamus, a sixteenth-century physician, are still being studied today.

### **Early Restoration Movements**

One of the early restoration movements was Montanism. As the apostolic age came to a close the anticipation of Christ's immediate return began to wain. Challenging what was seen as a spiritual decline in the Church, around 156 Montanus, with two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, began to declare the dispensation of the Holy Spirit and the end of the world with the New Jerusalem to be established in Phrygia. "It was this thought of the special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, combined with a fresh outburst of the early prophetic enthusiasm, and a belief that the end of the age was close at hand, that were represented in Montanism" (Walker 56).

A turning away from the lax stance that had been taken in Rome marked this movement. Montanists allowed no remarriage, practiced celibacy, fasting, and the abstinence from meat. As a counter measure to the worldliness of the Church, Montanism held that the gifts of the Spirit were available to all as had been the tradition in the apostolic age. Unfortunately, the gifts were soon to become the soul possession of the clergy and especially the bishops.

The corrective movement of Montanism found one of its strongest supporters in Tertullian. Adopting the name of "New Prophecy," Tertullian not only recognized the need for a stricter lifestyle but also the development of a Holy Spirit theology, which emphasized the use of prophecy as a way of enhancing Scripture. As David Rankin states, "The New Prophecy for Tertullian did not seek to replace the Scriptures; it sought rather only to illuminate and support them by removing the dangers presented by those ambiguities which are regularly and willfully seized upon by the heretics" (48).

Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132-1202) also led a restoration movement emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit. Dispensational in orientation, he saw the Old Testament as the age of the Father, the New Testament as the age of the Son, and the third age being that of the Holy Spirit. The age of the Father was lived under law, while that of the Son was lived under grace. This age would last for forty-two generations of thirty years each. The new age of the Spirit would proceed from the Old and New Testaments and be inaugurated c. 1260 (Cross 727).

These restoration movements were, by and large, short-lived but impacted the Church as followers made attempts to express the movement, at times, in unhealthy fashion. These movements represent a continual development of Holy Spirit theology and prophecy.

### **The Reformation**

During the Protestant Reformation, God began to transform the Church in a dynamic way. The Reformation began in the early 1500s with reformers Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. They took their cue from Augustine, who, except for gifts of healing taking place under his ministry, believes the gifts belonged to the first-century Church. Augustine equates salvation with baptism, and since infants do not speak in tongues as they are baptized, he reasons that the gift of tongues along with other miracles are not for the present time. He asks, “Why, they say, are those miracles, which you affirm were wrought formerly, wrought no longer? I might, indeed, reply that miracles were necessary before the world believed, in order that it might believe” (819). While Augustine makes a strong appeal to the healing miracles, his theology created a thought process that led Luther, Calvin, and others to take a cessationist view of the charismata.

The term *sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone, became the formal principle of the Reformation. Luther at age twenty had not yet seen the Bible. The Church was the rule and authority. “The principle of *sola scriptura* was intended to safeguard the authority of Scripture from the servile dependence upon the Church which in fact made Scripture inferior to the Church” (George 81). In essence the Church had been making its own rules. Luther’s desire for the preeminence of Scripture left him concerned about things experiential. In his sermon on the Gospel of John he writes, “The spirit of prophecy is still present in Christendom, but not so markedly as in the apostles. We, too, can predict and know such things, but only if we have learned this from the book of the apostles” (366). While Luther saw prophecy in light of Scripture, he did leave room for divine healing. His letter to Severin Schulze lays out the pattern for receiving divine healing (53). Notwithstanding, Luther’s view would lead his followers to the Scriptures and away from experiential gifts.

Calvin would take a similar view. “The Spirit of Christ seals the doctrine of the written Word on the minds of the godly” (*Institutes* 109). His concern was for those who would reject Scripture in favor of experience:

Hence the office of the Spirit promised to us is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the Gospel recommends. (110-11)

Calvin saw the image of the Spirit in the Word. They were, in fact, for him the same.

“We embrace the Spirit with no danger of delusion when we recognize him in the image that is, in his Word” (112).

The concern again was for the supremacy of Scriptures. The time period fostered the development of this attitude. The Scriptures were not in the common hands, and all that was left was the Church and experience, allowing for great excesses against which

Luther, Calvin, and others would testify. The desire of these men was to lay the foundation of the gifts within the framework of the Word:

When Paul says to the Thessalonians “Quench not the Spirit,” he does not carry them aloft to empty speculation apart from the Word; he immediately adds, “despise not prophesying” (1 Thess. 5:19, 20.) By this, doubtless he intimates that the Light of the Spirit is quenched the moment prophesying falls into contempt. How is this answered by those swelling enthusiasts in whose idea the only true illumination consists, and carelessly laying aside and bidding adieu to the Word of God, with no less confidence than folly, they fasten upon any dreaming notion which may have casually sprung up in their minds? (Calvin, Commentary 112)

For the reformers, less thought was given to dealing in the miraculous and particularly the miraculous gifts than was given to protecting the Scriptures. Though miracles, especially healings, took place during the time of Augustine and continued to take place throughout Church history including the time of the Reformation, the need to protect Scripture from hearsay, both real and perceived, would allow these reformers little room for the experiential.

While the reformers’ concern for Scripture would lead to the development of cessationism, Wesley’s theology, particularly as developed in America, would prepare the seedbed for the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement and the resurgence of the prophetic movement.

### **John Wesley**

Wesley was to take a much more open view of the gifts. While his position seems to vacillate through his writings, he accepts as valid the full range of the gifts:

In a letter written to Conyers Middleton, he lists what he considers the chief spiritual gifts conferred on the apostolic church as “Casting out devils, Speaking with new tongues, Escaping dangers, in which otherwise they must have perished, Healing the sick, Prophecy, foretelling things to come, Visions, Divine dreams, and Discerning of spirits.” (Works 10: 16)

These gifts were to play a prominent role in Wesley’s ministry as well as for the people



called Methodist. “Although Wesley never emphasized certain gifts such as prophecy or tongues and their interpretation, he did regret their loss to Christians in general” (Tuttle, “Gifts of the Holy Spirit” 18).

In his own use of the gifts, Wesley considered his call as elder to be an ordinary call while the signs and wonders that accrued from his preaching as evidence of his extraordinary call. In a letter to his brother Charles, he writes, “My extraordinary call is witnessed by the work God doeth by my ministry; which proves that he is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office” (Works 12: 106). So strong were his feelings around the gifts that on occasion they would get him into trouble. When he took over a work in Bristol from Whitefield, he was cautioned to maintain order. The reference was to the enthusiasm Wesley’s audience would often display. Wesley quickly ignored this caution. In a lengthy discussion of the potential misuse of signs and wonders, John White discusses Wesley’s “tendency to foster the manifestations for the wrong reasons” (129). In fact, concerning the occasion in Bristol, White states, “Wesley was using the manifestations to justify his betrayal of a trust” (127). A fine line exists between being used of the Holy Spirit and using the Spirit, a problem from which Wesley was not immune.

Wesley reasoned that even at Pentecost not everyone received the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost. In his sermon on Scriptural Christianity, he concludes the issue saying, “Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the church throughout all ages, and whether or not they will be restored at the nearer approach of the restitution of all things are questions we are not needful to decide” (Works 5: 37-39).

In his sermon “A More Excellent Way,” Wesley gives evidence of the dichotomy in his thinking. In his opinion if the gifts are not in use it was “not because there was no

more occasion for them.... This is a miserable mistake; the real cause was the love of many almost all Christians, so called, was waxed cold” (Works 7: 27-7). Howard A. Snyder states, “Wesley believed that if the extraordinary gift of the Spirit had practically vanished in his day this was because of the fallen state of the church and represented a less than ideal situation” (Signs of the Spirit 216).

From his journal of 15 August 1750, Wesley writes specifically concerning the gift of prophecy:

By reflecting on an odd book which I had read in this journey, The General Delusion of Christians with regard to Prophecy, I was fully convinced of what I had long suspected,

1. That the Montanists, in the second and third centuries, were real, scriptural Christians; and,
2. That the grand reason why the miraculous gifts were so soon withdrawn, was not only that faith and holiness were well-nigh lost; but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves, and to decry them all as either madness or imposture. (Works 2: 204)

While Wesley would be called on to defend against enthusiasm in his ministry, he nonetheless took a critical look at the gift of prophecy. In his journal he writes of visiting the house of one of the French prophets. Of the prophecy she gave, Wesley states, “Two or three of our company were much affected, and believe she spoke by the Spirit of God. But this was in no wise clear to me” (Works 1: 190).

Wesley’s thought process and theological development would go through many stages. While open to the gifts as they function in his life and defending them as seen in his arguments with Conyers Middleton, Wesley was at times “unsystematic and incomplete in his treatment of the doctrine of the gifts” (Dayton 44). Snyder emphasizes this dichotomy by adding, “While Wesley’s view of spiritual gifts is largely undeveloped, he was certainly more aware of, cared more positively toward, the *charismata* than most

churchmen of his day” (Radical Wesley 97-98).

Wesley’s pneumatology expanded by John Fletcher became a key to Pentecostal theology and spiritual gift development. Frederick A. Norwood states, “Methodists made a major contribution to the development of the holiness churches” (301). While he indicates they “had no special share in the rise of Pentecostalism” (301), the two can hardly be separated. Laurence W. Wood sees the camp meeting style of worship “preserved in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement” (365). Making a direct connection he states, “Emerging out of this renewal of the Wesleyan tradition was the modern Pentecostal movement in 1906. This Pentecostal movement led to the emergence of the Charismatic movement that swept through mainline Protestant denominations” (365). Fletcher became the link that would connect Wesley to the Spirit movement.

While Wesley’s emphasis was more on the fruit of the Spirit, Fletcher “is much more interested in the promise of Christ’s return.... This thrust of the dispensational pattern in Fletcher pushes Methodism further out of the Christocentric pattern of thought and closer to a Pneumatocentric one” (Dayton 52). This thought found significant growth in the post-Revolutionary War American experience.

### **The Nineteenth Century American Methodist and Holiness Movement**

In the early 1800s, Methodism was the fastest growing faith group in America. In October 1789, Thomas Wallcut wrote a letter on the spread of Methodism. He states, “Some go so far as to say that fully half the people are Methodists already and that Methodism will be the established Religion of Virginia in a few years” (qtd. in Wigger 104). Not only was the movement fast growing, but it was also filled with enthusiasm that seemed fitting for the rough and ready environment of America. It was able to break through the established Church neutrality and allow for the great exuberance necessary

for the frontier resulting in the development of gifted laity as well as gifted clergy. The movement was filled with outbursts and acts of enthusiasm. When Wesley sent Thomas Rankin to America to provide leadership for the Methodist movement, Rankin found that enthusiasm to be far more than he could tolerate. At one conference he declared that he was alarmed at the noise he had witnessed in the southern states. “A stop must absolutely be put to the prevailing wildfire or it would prove ruinous to all we hold sacred (qtd. in Wigger 114).

While the camp meeting would grow into a social institution filled with acts of enthusiasm, it also became a place where the spiritual gifts were demonstrated including the gift of prophecy:

The enthusiasm of the camp meeting is well known, but what is less frequently acknowledged is that a great many Methodists believed in the efficacy of prophetic dreams, visions, and supernatural impressions and were not afraid to base day-to-day decisions on such phenomena. Examples of this kind of supernaturalism abound in the journals and autobiographies of Methodist preachers and laymen and women. (Wigger 106)

Names such as Catherine and Freeborn Garrettson, John Granade, Benjamin Abbott, Sampson Maynard, Billy Hibbard, Mary Bradly, and James P. Crazy Houton give ample evidence to a faith based on the supernatural (Wigger 106-24). According to Snyder, “the whole Methodist system in fact encouraged the kind of spiritual growth in which useful charismas would spring forth and be put into redemptive service” (Radical Wesley 98). The combined force of clergy and laity functioning in bands and classes would allow the movement to reach its fullest potential. The gift of prophecy was intended for laity and clergy alike. The American movement of Methodism allowed for the ministry of anointed laity. The organizational genius of John Wesley allowed the Holy Spirit to move in ways that were prohibited in the established Church. “Methodism

thus provided considerably more opportunity for the exercise of gifts than did The Church of England where ministry was severely hedged about by clericalism” (98).

While the Holiness revival developed from the early Methodist camp meeting, its emphasis was on Christian perfection and the second blessings rather than on the “salvation” preaching of the early Methodists (Dayton 65). But growing out of the Methodist movement (and as a precursor to the Pentecostal movement the emphasis on spiritual gifts and healing by the laying on of hands continued (Wigger 105). Phoebe Palmer and Sarah Lankford were to “become the major figures of the Holiness Revival” (Dayton 65). “This post conversion experience, which began to receive a new emphasis in the 1830s, eventually gained widespread attention as evidenced by the first national holiness camp meeting held in 1867” (Synan, Century of the Holy Spirit 26). This movement with its emphasis on holy living became the seedbed from which would grow the modern-day Pentecostal movement.

### **Twentieth-Century Movements**

The twentieth-century marked a rapid increase in activities of the Holy Spirit. Spurred by a resurgence of the use of tongues and miraculous gifts, this period would see the development of a major movement in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

#### **Pentecostalism**

Charles Parham formulated “a classical Pentecostal theology in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901, and thus deserves recognition as the founder of the Pentecostal movement” (Burgess and McGee 660). Parham was a Methodist supply pastor who had been “enamored” with the theology of the holiness movement and with the experience of divine healing. He started a Bible school, and on 1 January 1901, “One of his students, Agnes Ozman, experienced the expected blessing and sign. During the next few days

Parham and about half of his student body of 34 were likewise baptized” (660). This movement embraced the full range of the spiritual gifts. Initially “associated with lower socioeconomic classes and regulated to the fringe of Evangelical Christianity, it would quickly gain notoriety with the Azusa Street Mission in 1906” (3).

The Azusa Street Revival ran from 1906 to 1913, and with it came the expansion of Pentecostal thought and doctrine. Today those churches who embrace the full range of spiritual gifts, including Pentecostal, charismatic, and third wave churches, make up the largest segment of Christianity worldwide outside the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Latter Rain**

Next came the Latter Rain movement that was a revival within the Pentecostal movement of the mid-twentieth century. The movement was characterized by an outpouring of the Spirit often accompanied by healings. According to the diary of Aaron Hawtin written on 12 February 1948, spiritual gifts were a prominent part of this revival:

The Lord spoke to one of the brethren. “Go and lay hands upon a certain student and pray for him.” While he was in doubt and contemplation, one of the sisters who had been under the power of God; went to the brother saying the same words, and naming the identical student he was to pray for. He went in obedience and a revelation was given concerning the student’s life and future ministry. After this a long prophecy was given with minute details concerning the great thing God was about to do. (qtd. in Burgess and McGee 532)

Healings and prophecies were a strong part of this movement, and several faith healing ministries were launched during this time.

### **Charismatic Movement**

The charismatic movement, also called second wave, was a renewal movement begun in 1960 by an Episcopal priest named Dennis Bennett. The movement was marked by speaking in tongues and a greater emphasis on the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, most specifically healing. While connected in form to the Pentecostal movement, it broke

across denominational lines and became much more a work of the Spirit within existing Church structures. The charismatic movement sought to practice all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament including prophecy. Through this movement renewal of gifts found emphasis across theological barriers. Tommy Tyson, Ross Whetstone, Robert Tuttle, Robert Stamps, and William P. Wilson were early leaders in the charismatic movement within Methodism. As the charismatic movement moved quickly through denominations, guidelines were given in large part to recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit, protect against misuse, and offer criteria for inclusion within the existing church structure to prevent the need for a church split. The Methodist church included guidelines for both clergy and laity who have had a charismatic experience and guidelines for clergy and laity who have not (Guidelines 3-4).

The desire, at least in form, to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit can be seen from the following statement from the Guidelines:

The criteria by which we assess the validity of another's religious experience must include its compatibility with the mind and the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament. If the consequences and quality of a reported encounter with the Holy Spirit be manifestly conducive to division, self-righteousness, hostility, and exaggerated claims of knowledge and power, then the experience is subject to serious question. However, when the experience clearly results in new dimensions of faith, joy, and blessing to others, we must conclude that this is "what the Lord hath done" and offer him our praise. (3)

Problems within the denomination occur when theological roots are not recognized. Problems occurred when a more classical Pentecostal theology was adopted by these charismatics. A second issue was the desire on the part of some to make a theology out of the experience and ignore sound doctrine.

While many who express the charismatic gifts including speaking in tongues have moved to Pentecostal and nondenominational settings, those who remain continue to

bring a source of the Spirit's power to their churches (Burgess and McGee 131-59).

### **Third Wave**

While many independent churches developing out of the charismatic renewal held ties to Pentecostal or charismatic churches, a new form of independent church began in the 1980s, entitled third wave. Third wave is a term established by Wagner referring to the most recent outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Pentecostal and charismatic being the first two (Third Wave of the Holy Spirit 18). These churches, which are on the increase, are also referred to as word and power churches. They bring together a strong theological base as well as signs and wonders with the basic beliefs:

1. Baptism of the Holy Spirit comes at conversion rather than a second work of grace;
2. Multiple fillings of the Holy Spirit are expected;
3. Tongues are not the sign of that filling but are generally seen as one of the many gifts;
4. Ministry is done within the context of the body of believers rather than as simply anointed individuals; and,
5. Divisiveness due to style of worship and doctrine is avoided (Burgess and McGee 844; Grudem, Are Miraculous Gifts 12).

With the rise of these types of churches such as Vineyard Christian Fellowship, third wave churches have offered openness to the gifts without the restrictiveness that had previously existed. As these styles of churches grow, what is developing is what Wagner and others are calling new apostolic churches (Churchquake 33-52). The new apostolic church is the formation of independent "full Gospel" networks with the doctrinal philosophy of third wave churches.



## **Modern Day Restoration Movement**

Many in the Pentecostal and charismatic groups as well as others see in the last half of the twentieth century a restoration of the fivefold ministry as seen in Ephesians 4:11. Paul lists this group to include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Hamon outlines the restoration of the fivefold ministry beginning with teachers in the 1950s and adding one a decade concluding with the apostles in the 1990s (Prophets and the Prophetic 46-48). The restoring of all five gifts to the Church brings a more complete witness of Christ's Spirit to the Church. Revelation 19:10 states, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." With this restoration, Hamon, Wagner, and others see prophetic and apostolic gifts functioning in the church today. These gifts are having a profound effect on modern-day church structure across denominational lines.

### **Prophecy Defined**

The gift of prophecy is defined in many ways. A number of the Spiritual gift inventories define it based on their own theological persuasion. For example, Leslie B. Flynn describes prophecy from basically a cessationist view: "Since the completion of Bible, in which divine revelation is once-for-all written, the gift of prophecy is now identified with proclamation based on God's word" (51).

Don and Katie Fortune divide up the gifts among the three major gift chapters of Ephesians, Romans, and 1 Corinthians, and then use the Romans gifts as motivational and change the word prophet to perceiver. They identify a prophet as "one who clearly perceives the will of God" (17).

Charles V. Bryant emphasizes the now quality of the gift of prophecy. He states, "Today's true prophets have the extraordinary ability to receive and to articulate current messages from God, positive as well as negative, for today's living" (130). He is

identifying that prophecy has both the elements of foretelling and forth-telling but that often the forth-telling is the message from God for the present.

Wagner defines prophecy as “the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to his people through a divinely-anointed utterance” (Your Spiritual Gifts 228).

David Pytches uses Wagner’s definition but extends it further to indicate that the communication received from God would be to “his gathered people, a group among them or anyone of his people individually, through divinely anointed utterance” (79).

From a more present-day Wesleyan standpoint, Kenneth Cain Kinghorn defines prophecy as “light for the present” (49). He says, “Prophecy means basically to speak God’s word with divine anointing” (48).

Gentile expands their definitions to include the purpose of prophecy:

New Testament prophecy occurs when a Spirit-filled Christian receives a “revelation” (*apokalupsis*) from God and then declares that revelation to the gathered church under the impetus of the Holy Spirit. He lists four steps in prophesying:

Prophecy takes place when

- God gives a revelation (communication, divine truth, message, insight)
- to a Spirit-filled Christian (one of God’s people, a spiritual intermediary)
- who speaks it forth (an oral declaration) to the gathered church (the public assembly of believers)
- under the impetus of the Holy Spirit (inspiration, stimulation, prompting, encouragement, empowerment). (162)

Paul states that prophecy is “for the believers, not the unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22b). In this discussion about tongues and prophecy, Paul lays claim to prophecy as the gift that will bring unbelievers into the worship of God:

But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among

you!” (1 Cor. 14:24-25)

### **Correlating Gifts**

The various Spiritual gift books and inventories divide the gifts in a variety of ways. Differing gifts are included according to the purpose of the author. Wagner, who has done extensive work in the gift area, includes twenty-seven gifts (Your Spiritual Gifts) while Kinghorn, in his gift mix, includes twenty. The Wesleyan gift questionnaire lists twenty-nine gifts and includes in its inventory those things that are often referred to as talents. For instance, music, both vocal and instrumental, and also the talent of craftsmanship, both artistic and manual, are included. The ones that need to be discussed here are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. These gifts deal again with revelation from God in specific types of settings and so are often mixed in with the gift of prophecy. Douglas A. Oss refers to them as utterance gifts (91).

The gift of tongues is one of the most hotly debated and written about of the miraculous gifts. I include it here as one of the revelatory or utterance gifts because the interpretation of an unknown language is a prophetic function. The gift of tongues ranges from a prayer language to an unknown language within a worship service that receives an immediate interpretation to the Holy Spirit granting the ability to speaking in a known but unfamiliar language. The latter is demonstrated by Kingsley Fletcher who, in a moving testimony of his involvement in the Shai state in the West African nation of Ghana, received that language by the Holy Spirit (Wagner, *Speech at National School*). When an unknown language is given in worship followed by interpretation, a prophetic function takes place.

The next of these gifts is the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. These

are listed separately but are generally interpreted as the special ability to speak knowledge or wisdom into a situation by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Wagner identifies the word of knowledge as the ability to “accumulate, analyze and clarify information and ideas that are pertinent to the growth and well being of the body” (Your Spiritual Gifts 218). While these gifts are often interpreted as applying learned knowledge and wisdom, they are also understood more as a “now word” and refer to information God wishes to speak into a specific situation by the act of revelation (Grudem, Systematic Theology 1080-82; Keener 115-16).

Cindy Jacobs refers in the more classical charismatic way to the word of knowledge as a part of the prophetic gifting. She states, “the kind of ministry I was doing is called ‘flowing in word of knowledge,’ which means a supernatural word God gives you directly” (102).

The word of wisdom is closely connected with the word of knowledge. The word of wisdom is a spiritual ability to know what to do with information, particularly the word of knowledge. Hamon states that a word of wisdom is “[the] supernatural ability in the Spirit to impart special and specific information, insight, guidance, or counsel which brings life-changing illumination” (Ministering Spiritual Gifts Workbook 6.4).

The word of knowledge may also be referred to as a rhema word. A rhema word is actually a word from the Scripture. “A rhema, then, is that timely, Holy Spirit-inspired word from the Logos that brings life, power, and faith to perform and fulfill it” (Hamon, Prophets and Personal Prophecy 31).

Prophecy functions at three levels in the body of Christ. The primary function is the opportunity each believer has to hear from God. This is the role of prophecy. Wagner shows how Christian roles are different from the spiritual gifts (Your Spiritual Gifts 90).

Prayer becomes a prime example. All Christians are to pray. Prayer is a part of the faith journey for maturing Christians. Because I pray does not mean I have the gift of intercessory prayer. My faith demands that I tell others about Jesus, but giving my personal testimony does not define the gift of evangelism. Similarly, because I do not have the gift of prophecy does not mean that occasionally I should not expect God to give me a message or a word for others.

At a second level, prophecy functions as a gift that is used in the context of the local church as part of an individual's spiritual gift mix. For instance, the person with the primary gift of intercessory prayer will often also have the prophetic gift. Individuals with the prophetic gift receive prophecy on a more regular basis but function within a known community of believers. Prophecy, at this second level, like teaching, preaching, and praying, is developmental in nature. While God is the giver, the believers must prepare themselves and make use of the gift. Within the gifted, timing, talent, and anointing of God combine. Some are given five talents, others two, and some one. God controls the distribution.

The third level of prophetic functioning is the prophetic office. The office of prophet is based on the strength of the gifting. This strength of their prophetic gifting allows such persons to be recognized beyond the local church setting. While the strength of the prophetic office allows it to function in a broader arena, the prophet must function as a team with a pastor or apostolic leader in order to maintain accountability to the greater body of believers. In all three settings, God is using the prophetic gift to give direction to his body, the Church.

### **Prophetic Function**

One of the difficulties with the gift of prophecy has been its ability to function

within the life of the church today. In 2000 I attended the second prophetic conference held by Peter Wagner in Colorado Springs. A great deal of the energy of that conference seemed to go toward the healing of wounds created in the first conference in 1999. At the first prophetic conference in 1999, a tremendous energy in the prophetic spirit had been released. Many of those prophets had gone home and reaped, as Wagner would state, “holy havoc on the church” (Speech at National School). Pastors from across the country, discouraged by what had taken place, wrote letters to the conference leaders. Therefore, at the 2000 conference, Chuck D. Pierce and Wagner modeled a team role of apostle and prophet in order to demonstrate how the prophet functions in the life of the church. Their goal was to show that prophets need to be teamed with apostles and that prophets need to submit to pastoral ministry.

Jacobs describes two problems she has had to face—one as a woman and the other to be recognized and understood as a prophet (35-54). The Church, for a variety of reasons, fears and misunderstands the prophet. Part of the problem is that prophets have not understood their gift and used it within the confines of an established church protocol. In part, Paul’s letter to the Corinthians was intended to give clear directions on how prophecy was to function in an orderly fashion.

In an April 2000 article entitled, “Can Prophets Be Polite?” Michael Sullivant states, “In many charismatic churches, those who have the gift of prophecy can be pushy, rude and sometimes arrogant. If you want to be a prophet, you need to learn some manners” (98). Sullivant continues, “Speaking for God is serious stuff. Those who speak prophetically cannot be arrogant with their gift” (100). In agreement, Paul asserts that “The Spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:32-33). Paul was giving directions for each one to be

able to prophesy within good order, allowing the people the opportunity to weigh, judge, and sift the prophecy's accuracy. People with personal axes to grind have become prophetic in the life of the local congregation simply to dominate or to move the body in a direction that they want it to go. Such abuse of the prophetic gift has created fear and distrust.

Another cause for concern is the arrogance factor. Some with the gift use it as a way of being "superspiritual." Their goal is not to comfort, edify, or encourage but rather to display personal power. God grants gifts as God sees fit. What must be demonstrated with a prophet is the fruit of the Spirit. If the fruit of the Spirit is exhibited, acceptance of the prophetic gift is much more likely.

Mike Bickle talks about lessons learned the hard way. As a pastor in the Kansas City area, he became associated with a group who became known as the Kansas City Prophets and went through some tremendous growing experiences while learning how to deal with the gift of prophecy. This growth centered on protocol issues and how to allow the prophetically gifted to minister during the worship service (134-46). How and when to give prophecy will vary from church to church. When and how prophecy is given can have as much importance as the word itself. The area of protocol causes prophets to run into the greatest difficulty. Issues of authority and submission in developing church protocol are important (Jacobs 144-73). On the importance of protocol, Wagner states, "In my opinion, this is one of the highest priority challenges facing the current New Apostolic Reformation. We must focus our energies on developing a spiritual protocol for prophets and prophetic ministries" (Pastors & Prophets 16).

### **Prophetic Protocol**

Protocol issues range from when, where, and how to prophesy, as well as who

should deliver it. At times, the urgency of the message is a critical issue while in other instances the message needs to be tested by trusted advisors. During public worship prophecy may need to be tested by the pastor or others before it is given to the church. Once it is given, the broader community has the opportunity of weighing what was said. When prophecy or words of knowledge are given in settings outside of worship, the responsibility for weighing rests with the one receiving. While protocol issues will help in getting the word right and protect people from modern-day fortune tellers, care must be given not to overreact and quench the Spirit. When the word is from God, confirmation will come in the spirit of the believers. Within the body of believers, those who have given prophecy accurately and more frequently will be allowed greater freedom in giving a word from the Lord. Training should also be implemented as part of protocol issues. Just as schools of prophets existed in the past, so classes in spiritual gifts allow individuals the opportunity not only to identify their spiritual gift but also to practice using their gift. These opportunities are especially important with the gift of prophecy. Functioning in a safe environment allows for correction to be given, strengthening the gift.

In delivering prophecy, several prophecies on the same topic may be presented. A summary of these may be given by leadership to prevent redundancy. Prophecies given outside of worship that speak to the structure and ministry of the church should be referred to the senior pastor.

Protocol issues are also used to protect against abuse. Abuse can come in a number of ways. Some who receive a word can find almost an adrenaline rush need to bring forth prophecy. Similar to those who always have a testimony, some individuals can be found who repeatedly run to the microphone to bring prophecy. Disorder can



result from misuse of prophecy and the Spirit quenched as it flows in others. As Sullivant says, “The somewhat intoxicating nature of having the ‘voice of God’ break into our experience, our excitement can lead us to imagine that God must want to release a prophetic word through us or someone else at almost any time and place” (Prophetic Etiquette 105). False or inaccurate prophecies can flow out of a personal desire to bring forth a word at a particular time. The rule is when the Lord is quiet, let the prophet be quiet as well. The need to protect against abuse necessitates a system of checks and balances. Pastoral coverage and supervision help in the weighing process. When inspirational prophecy is given for edification, exhortation, and comfort, training needs to be given so believers know they must discern what is given in their prayer life. When inspirational prophecy is given, two or more people need to be present to provide checks and balances. Accountability helps prevent the misuse by some in what is termed parking lot prophecy.

Another issue of abuse comes when people give information at an inappropriate time. The prophet is always in control. Just because prophecy enters the mind does not mean the prophet should speak forth a word from God. Some words from God are immediate and, as such, need to be delivered in a timely fashion, while others need to be held for the appropriate time. The prophet, through training and practice, should learn to discern between the immediate and that which needs to wait for the proper time.

Abuse can also happen when a prophet projects his or her own personal schedule. One area in which the personal agenda can occur is in a desire to dominate another. A word from God brings a certain authority to it. Using this power to control another or a church is a clear sign of abuse.

Revelation prophecy is another area that needs to be managed carefully. When

Agabus prophesied that Paul was going to be bound and turned over to the authorities, Paul had the responsibility to determine by the Holy Spirit what to do with the information (Acts 21:10-14). Revelation prophecy needs to be tested and discerned by the leaders in the body. If a single leader “rules” by a word from the Lord, abuse is sure to follow. Unhealthy churches develop when they are locked into one person’s viewpoint, and churches have been damaged and split as a result. The control for abuse is a healthy growth in the fruit of the Spirit. “When humility goes out of our life, it leaves a big hole into which arrogance, self-importance, egotism, and complacency can descend to fill the space” (Cooke 158).

### **Pastor as Prophet**

The pastor has the opportunity to function in the prophetic role as he or she gives direction to the church. Scripture is a rich source for God to speak to his people. Prophecy must not be limited to the word of knowledge or message in tongues. Pastors must be open to the Spirit’s leading as the Scripture is proclaimed. The writer of Hebrews states, “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Because Scripture is living, God will regularly use it as a primary source to give a word to the people. Opportunities must be made for those who place themselves under pastoral leadership to bring forth “living word” prophecies. Most pastors at one time or another have been led into a present application of the Word of God by the Spirit of God. Preaching can often be a prophetic experience. For this very reason, those who preach and teach “will be judged more strictly” (Jas. 3:1).

### **The Character of the Prophet**

The character and prayer lives of prophets are of utmost importance. In fact, their

character evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives is an important indicator of the accuracy of the message they bring. God warns the people of Israel in Jeremiah 23 and Micah 2 as well as elsewhere about false prophets: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hope. They speak visions from their own minds not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16). One of the tests of the prophets had to do with whether they were motivated out of self-interest. Micah says, “This is what the Lord says: ‘As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim peace; if he does not, they prepare war against him’” (Mic. 3:5). The issue of false prophets is as important today as it was in Jeremiah’s time.

The prophets were often used to bring a hard word to the nation. While Micah predicted destruction and captivity, false prophets generally predicted peace. While the prophet may have a hard word to speak to the nation, the proof of that word is in the quality of the prophets’ character. The prayer life of those who prophesy is important. Prayer and discernment by those who hear is also important. Submission to the authority of the church and the pastor become important in delivering what is often called revelation prophecy. Graham Cooke asks, “When does a prophetic person become a wolf in sheep’s clothing? It occurs when we ignore character issues that God wants to deal with. Disregarding a life-style of accountability produces a nature that is ungovernable and not to be trusted” (100).

What the prophet does in public is not nearly as important as how they lead their lives. The quality of John the Baptist’s life and ministry was what brought the people to him. The prophets today must be held accountable to bear the fruit of the Spirit if they are to be granted the right to use the spiritual gift of prophecy.

The Didache communities used the test of character following the Micah

principle. As Melavec states, “The impression given is that the community had more to fear from abusive and wayward prophets than to receive from true ones” (73). The apostle/prophet was to be accepted as one received “from the Lord” as long as they were passing through and received no money (Jefford 27).

The discernment of the character of prophets and their accountability to the community of faith remain key attributes in their reliability to speak for the Lord. As Sullivant states, “A godly kind of synergism is created when we mutually submit the use of our spiritual gifts for the building up of one another in the love of God” (Prophetic Etiquette 121).

### **Mistaken Prophecy**

Mistaken prophecy as opposed to false prophecy is an issue that strikes the center of the prophetic debate. “Prophets are usually placed in a difficult dilemma. If they were to claim infallibility, they would be denounced as heretics. Yet as soon as they demonstrate their fallibility by making a mistake, they are labeled a false prophet” (Hamon, Prophets and Personal Prophecy 158). Prophecy consists of a variety of elements. Like those of the Old Testament prophet Daniel, prophecies today are not always clear to the prophet. Sometimes the meanings of words are not clear. Another element is timeliness. A word or prophecy is given, but the fulfillment is delayed. The ever-present danger of the prophet distorting the prophecy by adding his or her own interpretation is another pitfall. When the prophet receives the word “child” or “baby,” it may be interpreted as pregnancy, which may or may not be correct. Everything that comes to a prophet’s mind should be filtered before it goes through his or her lips.

Another area of great difficulty for the prophet and the Church is the mistaken prophecy. The Agabus story in the book of Acts is often lifted up to illustrate the fact that

even some New Testament prophecies may have had errors connected with them. Most of the literature will debate on one side or the other of the Agabus story. The issue is that for any number of reasons prophecy can be given in error. The only inerrancy that has been given is Scripture. For the prophet today, discernment becomes the key factor. False prophecies not only create difficulties in the life of the church but can also create an atmosphere of mistrust. The issue of false prophets has been around forever. Jeremiah writes these words that God gives him in regard to false prophets: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16). In Jeremiah’s time as well as today, prophets not only prophesied in the name of false gods but also prophesied the thoughts and dreams of their own mind in order to gain power. False prophecy did not invalidate Jeremiah and others who were his contemporaries, and it does not invalidate those who hold the prophetic gift today.

The contemporary use of the gift of prophecy is to edify, encourage, and comfort the Church just as it was in Jeremiah’s day. His words were a challenge to the nation of Israel. As the Old Testament prophets spoke, they were speaking God’s word to the nation. As the prophets speak to the Church today, they are speaking God’s word. Prophecy is not intended to challenge Scripture, but it is a confirmation to God’s people of his love, his presence, and his desire to speak to them.

### **Elements of Prophecy**

Two basic types of prophetic words are commonly spoken today. The first is inspirational prophecy. This type of prophecy is often called personal prophecy and is God’s desire is to build the body of believers. Inspirational prophecy allows God to speak to an individual through flesh and blood. What is often difficult for believers to receive

through their own thought life, the prophet is able to bring as a word from the Lord. Inspirational prophecy can also come through the Scriptures. The prophet/pastor may receive a word for an individual or for the church as a whole. At this level prophecy releases the joy of the Lord and brings a sense of peace and reverence for God. In this way inspirational prophecy becomes an aid to worship as worshipers are more fully aware of the presence of the Lord. All believers have the ability to prophesy at this level, especially during times of worship. This type of prophecy will often bring about edification, exhortation, and comfort. A great deal of prophecy in the church today comes in this form.

The second general type of prophecy is revelation prophecy. This type of prophecy is intended to bring about correction and direction. As God desires a change in ministry direction or a need for correction to the church, the prophet is often challenged to bring the message. This type of prophecy must be held in prayer and then passed to the pastor and church leadership. Protocol issues become even more important in dealing with revelation prophecy. These prophecies need to be written out before they are given to the leadership. The process of writing allows the prophet to become sure of the prophecy before it is presented. Once this prophecy is presented to leadership, it no longer becomes the responsibility of the prophet. The pastor and church leadership after prayer can determine the best way to present the prophecy. While all prophecy must be prayed over, revelation prophecy with its elements of correction and direction demand greater accountability and, as such, needs to be discerned by the leadership before it is given.

Three major aspects of the gift of prophecy are revelation, interpretation, and application (Cooke 91). The first of these is God's act of revelation. Revelation may

come in terms of a vision or picture seen in the mind's eye. It can come as a single word or a phrase. The prophet must discern whether enough information is present to share the prophecy. Hamon, in his workshops and in his books, talks of prophesying for multiple hours. It becomes for him a step of faith. Years of practice were needed to develop that sense of inward calling that helps a prophet discern if a revelation is pertinent and valid.

The second aspect of prophecy is interpretation. When and how to present material received is an important aspect. Interpretation becomes the place of the intertwining of the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and prophecy. Some information needs to be shared at the time that it is granted while other pieces of revelation are to be shared at another time. Much difficulty has resulted when information was shared wrongly or inappropriately. Appropriately discerning the word or message God has given places a tremendous burden on the prophet. Pierce illustrates the five dynamic functions of prophecy as comfort, edification, exhortation, redemption, and direction (21-23).

The third piece is application. Words can be wrongly spoken when human understanding is applied. For instance when information about blood pressure is given, the prophet may naturally assume that high blood pressure is an issue and offer that up as information. The reality is that it could be low blood pressure, and misinterpretation could be presented. "Even seasoned prophetic people can misapply revelation" (Deere, Beginner's Guide 84). These are the kind of practical and pragmatic issues that happen in the deliverance or the application phase of prophecy.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

Prophecy as a gift has long been neglected. The reasons though varied have much to do with the movement of God's Spirit. Throughout the twentieth century, and particularly during the last half, God seems to be releasing the Spirit of prophecy back to the Church in a significant way; however, the Church, set in orthodox and historical comfort, ignores the Spirit's movement. With the Spirit's power comes awe and wonder that pushes the comfort zone. To remain comfortable one must keep from being called into the unknown. Therefore, most United Methodist Church members have little working knowledge of the gift of prophecy and are not particularly seeking it. Some United Methodist churches, however, recognize and utilize the gift of prophecy as an ongoing spiritual gift. By interviewing a cross-section of these churches, I hope to discover ways in which this gift can be recognized and encouraged. Despite the great breadth of theology that exists within the United Methodist Church, my hope is to create greater understanding so that this gift of God may be more fully used for all God's people.

#### **Research Questions**

Three primary research questions guided this study.

##### **Research Question 1**

How do the churches in this study understand the nature and purpose of the prophetic gift?

In evaluating how the gift of prophecy functions in certain United Methodist churches, question 1 sought to determine how the gift is understood and defined by those who use it. Clear definition becomes crucial as the gift is operationalized in the worship



service. In a denomination based on the itinerant system, this question sought to determine how the local church understands and defines prophecy.

### **Research Question 2**

How does the prophetic gift function in these churches?

The purpose of this question is to understand how the gift of prophecy is utilized and to discover how the individual who has identified himself or herself with the gift of prophecy applies this spiritual gift. A second aspect of this question is to learn how prophecy functions in the corporate life of the Church. Because of the nature of the prophetic gift, this question also reveals the nature of prophetic protocol within these churches.

### **Research Question 3**

How are the prophetically gifted in these churches validated and held accountable?

Because of the potential for error and the concern for false prophets, the third question sought to understand how the church structure provides freedom of gift expression while providing protection for the flock. This question assumes greater importance when the pastor functions as the prophetic voice in the church.

### **Subjects**

The subjects for this project were taken from three United Methodist churches selected for their active use of the prophetic gift. Aldersgate Renewal Ministries (ARM), an official renewal group within United Methodism, was consulted. A list of churches known to function with prophetic ministries was obtained. From this list three churches were selected that would give a cross-section of both size and location (inner-city, urban, and rural). By utilizing churches of various sizes and locations, information was obtained

about potential issues around these factors. I made phone calls to the pastors of three churches that I had selected and obtained permission to use their churches in this study. A follow-up letter was sent thanking them for the opportunity to use their churches and identifying the parameters of the study. I included a brief introduction of myself with my age and background and included information on this Doctor of Ministry study. I identified that it was a study through Asbury Seminary and identified the names of my advisor and reader. I also identified some of the conferences that I had attended including those with Wagner and Hamon. The purpose of this material was to help them feel more at ease about the project and the direction from which I was coming. I also included the four basic questions that would compose the interview. My intent was to provide a comfort level to the pastors and give good information about the individual who would be coming in and interviewing members of their churches. I identified to the pastors that I would be trying to do a set of ten interviews over a two-day period of time. I would attempt to utilize a Friday and Saturday format and asked if the pastors would be able to line up ten people for interviews. I explained that the interviews would be approximately thirty minutes in length and asked for a time schedule that would allow for approximately an hour between interviews. I found the time between interviews to be an important factor as some were longer in length and an opportunity for personal recharge between interviews was necessary. The interviews were then set up with four to five on Friday and five or six on Saturday. All three pastors agreed, and follow-up e-mails and telephone calls confirmed dates and times. Because of extensive travel for two of the interviews, room reservations and accommodations also became a part of the process. The pastors of the three churches used a variety of methods in obtaining ten people for interviews. One pastor placed an announcement in the bulletin and then did follow-up calls to confirm the

interviews. Participants in that church were also provided the basic outline of the questions I used during the interview time. To fill the ten in that particular church, personal contact was made with some individuals. In the other two churches, contact was made personally by the pastor, hand-selecting folks that met the criteria I had given. Those criteria consisted of individuals who had the prophetic gift or office, individuals who had given or received prophecy, and individuals who did not fill either of the first two categories but had witnessed prophetic activity and prophecies given and received.

### **Instrumentation**

I used a self-designed interview instrument for data collection (see Appendix A). As a part of the interviews, background questions were used to obtain basic information about the participants: education, ministry experience, spiritual giftedness, and length of time as a Christian, length of time in present church, other church memberships, and present offices held in the church. This information became valuable in tracing out the spiritual journey of the subjects. By spending time in the interview obtaining this information, I was able to pull together information regarding their salvation experience and also their experience with baptism in the Spirit.

The four primary research questions were asked in an open-ended format with follow-up probes to help clarify or expand on answers (True 206). Care was given to manage for biases and reactivity. These problems can exist when participants want to give the correct answer or change their behavior when they are being observed (Zechmeister, Zechmeister, and Shaughnessy 102-03). A pretest was performed on the interview protocol, which allowed for feedback and adjustment to the instrument. Attention was given after the interview pretest to listen to the tapes, specifically listening for speech patterns or questions that would present problems in transcribing. Adjustments

here in clarifying the interview allow for a clearer transcription. Testing of recording equipment and its best placement was done during the pretest to ensure the highest quality of recording (Kvale 169).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection was accomplished by thirty open-ended taped interviews. In areas where extensive travel was necessary, I asked for a potential of eleven or twelve subjects to interview in order to ensure that I could obtain ten interviews. Care was given to the surroundings in order to reduce normal stress. Private rooms were obtained and subjects were ensured confidentiality. A standard tape recorder was used along with a tabletop multidirectional speaker which allowed the recording material to be less intrusive and still obtain good sound quality. Care was given to be near enough to a plug that electricity could be used for the recording device in order to not be concerned about battery life. I maintained a second recorder during the interviews to insure against potential equipment failures. I also took some notes to help with the transcribing during the course of the interview (Kvale 166-67). As the interview began, I clearly identified the nature of the project as a Doctor of Ministry study and indicated that the interview would be used in that research. Permission was gained to use the material in this study guaranteeing confidentiality of any sensitive material. During these preliminary comments the recording equipment was turned on. During the course of the interview, probes were used to enhance answers to the questions. I also took time to allow the subjects to tell their stories and expand upon how prophecy had been used in their lives. The process became more comfortable since they were no longer simply answering questions but telling their stories.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim creating approximately three hundred pages of transcribed interviews. In analyzing the data, I arranged the interviews in notebooks by churches. No analysis was done until all thirty interviews were complete. I then did an initial reading of the interviews, taking some notes as I went through them the first time. These notes allowed me to refresh my memory again with the interviews. I then created a series of grids which allowed me to formulate information about their ages, the number of years that they had been saved, information about the baptism in the Spirit, and various pieces of information along their faith journeys connecting them to denominations.

A second grid was created that brought together data around the major questions I was asking. I did this grid for all three churches so that I could look at a church as a whole and also compare each of the three churches. Additional personal story material was also marked and color coded. I found that by conducting each of the interviews personally and then transcribing them verbatim I was able to recall the interviews more clearly aiding greatly in the analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The gift of prophecy as a measurable entity is elusive at best. The impact of this gift upon the lives of those interviewed and their churches, however, cannot be overstated. The prophet comes to the people with a message from God, using words of knowledge, words of wisdom and the gift of prophecy. Each manifestation of the gift is slightly different, but they often overlap and are often not distinguishable in the lives of those who use them. Prophecy is for the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort of the believers and the conversion of the unbeliever. The purpose of this study was to explore how the gift of prophecy functions and is pastored within United Methodist churches who actively utilize the gift.

The research is centered around three research questions: How do the churches in this study understand the nature and the purpose of the prophetic gift? How does the prophetic gift function in these churches? How are the prophetically gifted in these churches validated and held accountable?

#### **Three Churches Studied**

Three churches were used for this study. Names were obtained from Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, which is an official renewal group in the United Methodist Church focusing on the Holy Spirit. I selected three churches from the names that were received. Attention was given to size and location in order to achieve a cross-section of United Methodism.

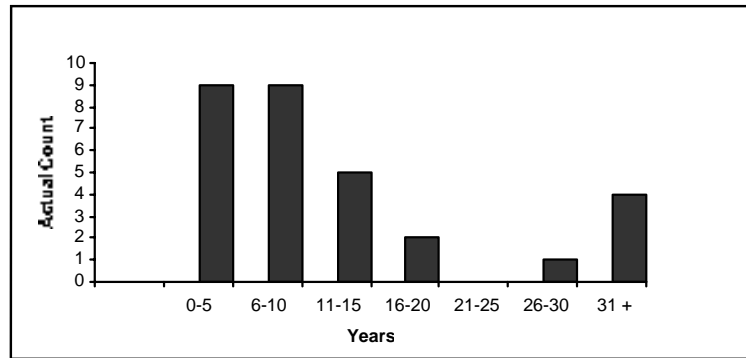
Trinity United Methodist Church is located in a suburb of the greater Columbus, Ohio, area but with a basically rural setting. The church has transformed itself from a small Evangelical United Brethren congregation to a church of attendance between three

and four hundred on Sunday morning. While close to the Columbus area, the church is still surrounded by a great deal of agricultural land and, as such, represents a more rural setting. Exousia United Methodist Church is an African-American, inner-city church within the Detroit, Michigan, area. As a church plant, which was started five years ago and was only officially chartered in 2003, it averages 120 to 130 in attendance on Sunday mornings. Washington Crossing United Methodist Church is located in a suburb of Philadelphia. The average Sunday attendance is in excess of eight hundred and, as such, it represents a large multi-staffed church.

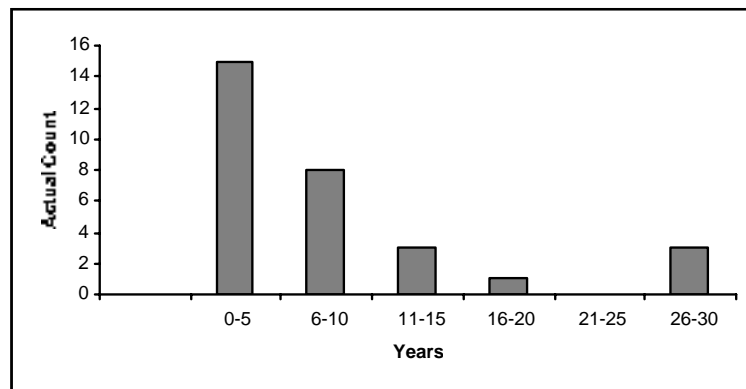
Phone calls were made to the pastors in order to receive permission to interview members of their churches. A follow-up letter was sent giving some background on me and the project and outlining how I wanted the interviews to take place (see Appendix C). The pastors of these three churches obtained volunteers for the project and set up the interviews which were open-ended and lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. During the interview process, certain demographic information was obtained. I made a conscious effort to draw out the spiritual journey of each of the individuals in order to understand where they had come to know the Lord and how long that they had been in United Methodism.

Of the participants, 60 percent had been United Methodist for ten years or less. When the number is extended to fifteen years, the percentage moves to over 75. The vast majority of those actively moving in prophetic ministry have not been lifelong members of the United Methodist Church (see Figure 4.1).

The second factor of years at the present church indicates that 50 percent of the participants have been at their present church five years or less and 87 percent have been at their present church for fifteen years or less (see Figure 4.2).



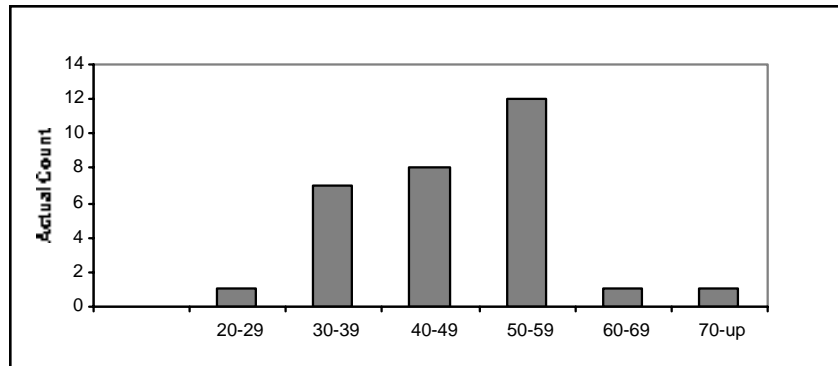
**Figure 4.1. Numbers of years as a United Methodist.**



**Figure 4.2. Number of years at present church.**

Demographic issues were also analyzed for the subjects interviewed. Age was determined by asking an age range of the subjects. Fourteen individuals were 50 or older, while sixteen were younger than 50. The two largest groups were the age spread of 50 to 59 with twelve people, and the ages of 40 to 49 with eight people. When I add the age spread of 30 to 39 with seven participants, the ages are lower than the average United Methodist church. These numbers may indicate a younger and more growth-oriented congregation than anything that deals with the prophetic (see Figure 4.3).

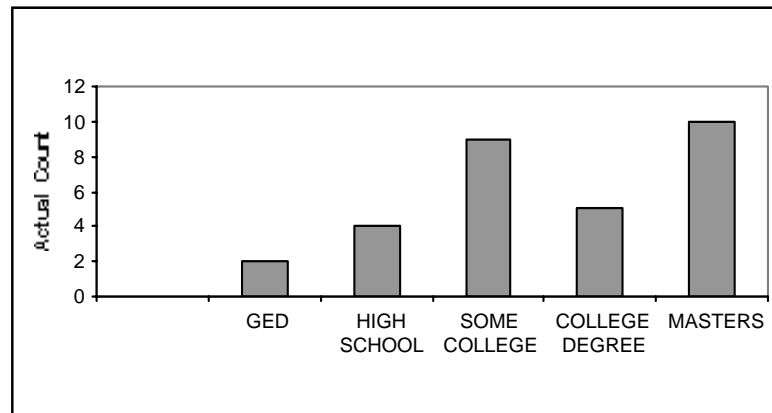




**Figure 4.3. Ages of subjects interviewed.**

Of those that were interviewed, eighteen were female and twelve were male. Peter's quote of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2 is interesting as he states, "Even on my servants both men and women I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:18). While leadership of women has long been emphasized in the United Methodist church, the prophetic giftedness heavily favored women in the churches interviewed. Trinity had more men in their leadership positions, but both Exousia and Washington Crossing had a majority of women in the key prophetic leadership positions. Although Exousia, with a female pastor would obviously be open to female leadership, the fact that all three churches were strongly evangelical and were each open and receptive to female leaders must be noted.

A third area of demographic interest was educational background. Of those surveyed ten held master's degrees and five held college degrees. Nine had some form of college education, and only five of those interviewed had no college education whatsoever. The educational background of the subjects interviewed was higher than expected. Master's degrees were held by 30 percent and 80 percent held college degrees or some college (see Figure 4.4).



**Figure 4.4. Years of education.**

Participants were questioned concerning how they understood their spiritual gifts. Of the thirty responses, seventeen individuals identified themselves with the gift of prophecy, five individuals with the office of prophet, and eight in terms of other spiritual gifts. The eight who focused on gifts other than prophecy all had prophesied and all but one had been given either a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom at some point in their lives. This data correlates with the three levels of prophecy: those who have received prophecy on occasion, those who regularly exercise the gift, and those who have the office of prophet and then utilize the gift not only in their local church settings but in other settings as well. No single spiritual gift inventory was taken by all of the participants, but they are all actively involved in the church where the prophetic gifting plays an important part. The gifts of exhortation, healing, and intercessory prayer were mentioned by those who did not claim the gift of prophecy as their spiritual gift. Nevertheless, all but one had prophesied at some point in time, and the one who had never prophesied or given a word of knowledge had received prophecy on several occasions and had witnessed it regularly in the life of the worship service (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1. Comparison of Spiritual Gifts**

<b>Church</b>	<b>Office of Prophet</b>	<b>Gifts of Prophecy</b>	<b>Other</b>
Trinity	2	5	3
Washington Crossing	2	6	2
Exousia	2	4	4

### **Defining the Gift of Prophecy**

The participants defined the gift of prophecy as a word received from the Lord. Thirteen described it using the phrase “a word from God or the Lord.” Unanimously, it was defined as something that the Lord had given to be shared with others. Participants also included the purpose of prophecy in their definitions. Over half saw prophecy as a means of comfort, edification, encouragement, and direction. When asked about the issue of prophecy as encouragement, one responded in this fashion:

Oh incredible encouragement. Especially like this last year and a half of my life personally where you just feel like you are throwing yourself out there and to consistently have people come forward and say, “You are doing the right thing. God told me this about you. Does that mean something to you?” Literally people that knew nothing about our situation, I’m like, “Oh, of course it does, that’s amazing.” So it’s the gas you need to get to the next step.

Another respondent when asked to define prophecy stated, “I would say that it’s being able to draw from the mind of God and give a word of encouragement or edification, or just being able to speak on behalf of the Lord to a person.” Another stated, “It’s the gift of exhortation, encouragement. It’s to be used to edify the church body. I think that would be my sum of what it is.”

As a final illustration, one respondent saw edification taking place even if the

prophetic word were a hard word for the church. In responding to the question about defining prophecy, the subject identified prophecy as edification:

I believe it is hearing the voice of God for the edification of the church. Possibly, sometimes, there may be things that are hard words to hear, but they will always draw you back to God, to want to be better, to want to do a better job, to want to love God more. I've always found that even the hard words are gentle. They are very loving, very kind, always pointing to how good he is.

Others mentioned that prophecies can function as warnings and opportunities for God to speak a message to his people for the building of the kingdom. One respondent defined prophecy as "the Lord speaking to his Church giving them his heart and direction. It's for the Church primarily for the common good."

When I probed them about how they had determined that they had the gift, those with the office of prophet and the gift of prophecy described incidents when they knew things that they could not know by any other means than from the Lord. Several of the participants identified experiences in their lives prior to coming to understand the gift of prophecy when they had known events or incidences that were going to take place prior to their happening. One subject spoke of an incident that got her into trouble. She relayed the incident as such:

I remember working in a restaurant and a guy came in and I heard very clearly that the guy was going to rob the place. So I went and actually told the manager about it. The manager said, "How do you know?" I said, "I just feel it." So what happened was the manager thought he was going to rob the place from the standpoint of the cash register but it was really that he wasn't going to pay his bill. So the manager went and actually called the police to search him, when in fact he just wasn't going to pay the bill. It wasn't a real robbery. So from there the manager called me in and said, "That really started a great commotion and we really can't have that." I said, "Well, that's what he was going to do." And he did, the guy actually did walk out and not pay the bill. So, I'm like, "He still robbed you!" Things like that would occur.

Another incident related by an individual tells of him being aware that his brother

was going to be shot before it happened:

When I was a child I always saw things. You know that déjà vu thing? I had seen my brother get killed, but this was before it happened. The night when he left to go to the party everybody was telling him, “Don’t go. Don’t go.” But I was asleep when he left, and he left like he knew he wasn’t coming back. While I was asleep, I saw him get shot from somebody on the side of the house.

As this subject portrays the rest of the story, he indicates that an innocent man was convicted of his brother’s murder, and he did not find out about it until after the trial. These two incidences represent a number that were portrayed throughout the interview process. Only one of the participants identified the gift in terms of foretelling future events which speaks well of the training and protocol established by the participating churches. However, many identified events which were, in fact, foretelling.

The participants described hearing from God in a variety of ways, including hearing an actual voice, receiving a word, seeing a picture, receiving a dream or vision, receiving a word from the Scriptures, or any combination of the above. Some spoke of how, when they had heard a word, it seemed to just bubble up and come forth. Individuals who had been taught how to present prophecy found that as they received a word they needed to open their mouth and give the word then and additional information would be given. How they defined the gift and how they received the gift, along with the strength of the gifting, helped present a picture of how the individual utilized the gift. One individual I was interviewing who had the prophetic office was describing the difference between a prophetic word, a word of knowledge, and a word of wisdom. He stated, “Often they will flow from one into the other. It would maybe go something like this: ‘I feel that the Lord is telling me that he wants to use you in a greater way than you are currently aware of.’” From here the individual continued in a prophecy about me. He simply flowed into a prophecy that, while general in nature, was specific enough to hit

me right on target. He, having never met me before, expanded on themes that had been given to me twice before in other prophecies. It became an example of someone with a strong prophetic flow moving in and out of prophecy at ease.

When asked about the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament prophecy, the participants saw them as one and the same. When I probed about accountability issues in relation to Old Testament prophets, the participants saw them as holding a prophetic office for the nation of Israel. None identified New Testament prophecy as 100 percent error free. A common theme among those interviewed was that God spoke to the Old Testament prophets specifically in regards to the nation of Israel, whereby in the New Testament he speaks to the individuals for the edification and encouragement of the Church.

### **How Prophets Function**

Although all held a high view of prophecy, prophets and their prophecies functioned in slightly different ways in each of the three churches. The differences reflected more the style and structure of the church. Trinity is an old and established church with the present pastor in his thirtieth year of ministry. The length of ministry has allowed for stability in the life of the church and allowed for a long-term transition toward using the charismatic gifts and particularly the gift of prophecy. With three to four hundred in average attendance, Trinity has one main worship service. Four main platforms are available where the prophetic gift to be utilized. One is during the morning worship. After the congregation has been led in praise and worship for a time, a quiet period follows in which those who are recognized as prophets within the congregation are free to bring a prophecy. One must be in membership and recognized by the pastor before being allowed to minister prophecy on Sunday morning. This constraint is stated in the

bulletin so that newcomers who may be flowing in the prophetic spirit realize that the prophetic time would not be open to them. Prophecies are at times delivered in tongues and then interpreted, and at other times they are simply ministered to the congregation as a whole. The weight of judgment on the prophecy during worship rests on the pastor and those leaders present. The testimony of several interviewed from that church is that prophecies, at times, affect the direction of the morning sermon and where the pastor will lead that morning.

Trinity has a board of elders that has been established by the pastor and the board itself. This board often judges the prophecies given. They also meet on Monday evening for prayer and worship and allow members in need of ministry to come and join them. Members going through a difficult time or crisis will ask for prayers and guidance from this board of elders, and prophecy is often used during this time.

A third way that prophecy is utilized at Trinity is in small groups. In this relatively safe environment, people are free to deliver a word they received from the Lord, and it is judged by the group leadership. Prophecies given may be for an individual of the group present or for the church as whole. The protocol issues would prevent individual or private prophecy. All subjects had received prophecy and realized the need to weigh personally what they had received. Matters of concern could be taken to the elders for clarification.

Church direction can be influenced by prophecy at Trinity. At one point in the recent past, a man came forward with a prophecy that God had given him as he was traveling. He wrote it out, and it was about a four-page prophecy in regard to a need for a new direction in the life of Trinity. The prophecy was weighed by the pastor and eldership and then delivered to the congregation on Sunday morning. This prophecy,

which called for a return to a number of basic ministries that had been overlooked by the church including jail ministries, feeding ministries, daycare ministries, etc., made an instant connection within the spiritual life of the church. The board of deacons took the prophecy and after spending some time in prayer divided up the leadership of these ministries. In overseeing and launching these ministries, they are at the same time building leadership into them so that the elders will eventually withdraw from the leadership and the ministries will continue. The delivery, validation, and implementation of this word from the Lord was not only a powerful use of the prophetic gift, but was also an excellent way to advance leadership and build teamwork within the life of the church.

Prophecy also functions in the life of the youth ministry. Youth meetings on Wednesday and Sunday evenings would typically mirror the adult worship. Opportunities for the young people to flow in the prophetic gift and give a word from the Lord are presented and encouraged. The youth leadership team oversees the activities and provides structure. These activities provide a great opportunity for the young people to begin to understand spiritual gifts and their development at a very early age.

Exousia United Methodist Church is a recent church plant. Founded in 1996 and fully chartered in 2003, it was founded by a prophetic pastor with prophecy as a vital part of its ministry. Although similar in structure to all United Methodist churches, its ministry is done by teams. Prophecy would be given rarely on Sunday morning. Like Trinity, a prophecy given from the congregation must be cleared with the pastor prior to being delivered. Also like Trinity, the pastor of Exousia will, from time to time, deliver a prophetic word herself during the morning worship. Following worship time the altar is often opened, and both healing and prophecy teams minister to people who come forward. Team members are trained and prophetically gifted people who weigh and judge



the prophecies oversee this time of ministry. Because of the prophetic office, Pastor Daniels often ministers beyond the local church. She occasionally takes members of the team with her, and as a group of three or four, they will minister at conferences and meetings.

At Exousia prophecy is used to set direction for the church and to add hope and encouragement to people who seek a word from the Lord. Anticipation of a larger church facility in the near future is a result of prophecy given to the church and is an example of how prophecy has given direction to the Exousia United Methodist congregation. Because of this type of prophecy, growth and building decisions are more easily made. Prophecy is also used to minister to individuals by appointment. These may be made by individuals who do not attend Exousia. At set times the prophetic team ministers to these individuals. These prophecies are recorded as are all prophecies so those receiving prophecy have a record of what was said. Tapes are copied and kept at the church. As with Trinity, prophecy is also encouraged among the youth. Young children who demonstrate prophetic tendencies are nurtured in their spiritual gifts.

Washington Crossing United Methodist Church is a large-staff church with one staff member who specifically heads up their prophetic and intercessory prayer teams. Prophecy in this church is utilized not only to bring encouragement and comfort to its members but also to give direction to its ministries. With an average attendance in excess of eight hundred members, the church has multiple Sunday morning worship experiences. The church is transitioning slowly with the gift of prophecy and the pastor is described as being very gentle as the church continues to transition. Prophecy is seldom used in morning worship, but the pastor and congregation are open to the leading of the Lord.

Sunday evening presents a time when worship is much more free flowing. The

prophetic word often flows during this time. Prophecies are presented to the staff or prophetic team leaders who will judge the prophecy before it is presented to the group as a whole.

Meetings are held twice monthly that are quiet prayer times called soaking prayer. These are times when small groups gather, music is played and folks are able to relax, come before the Lord and just receive. During this time prophecy often comes in words of encouragement and words of knowledge. Again, as with the other churches, protocol issues would prevent personal prophecies from being given. For instance, in a discussion with one subject about issues revealed in prayer, the conversation led to the topic of disease and the protocol for disclosure of that type of information. When asked about how that information would be disclosed, the subject indicated that such information would not be given:

We don't do that here. You might sense it, but you don't say it. We would never do that here. That's totally against.... Anything like that could change somebody's life. We don't talk about weddings, we don't talk about babies, we don't talk about jobs, and we don't talk about diseases.

This response was typical of those given, again indicating the tightness of protocol issues.

The music team and dance teams have a separate time set aside to worship together called "harp and bowl." Prophecy often flows during these times.

The transition in Washington Crossing church began in 1996 with a revival. The church had been divided by a strong pastor and had gone from seven hundred down to four hundred members. The division was not over the gifts of the Spirit but personality issues. When the present pastor came the Holy Spirit fell upon about 120 of the members during a worship service. The Spirit was manifested extensively during this time. The church has since transitioned from four hundred to approximately eight hundred in

attendance and continues to increase in its prophetic activities. Dreams, visions, and other prophetic words, when received by members of this church are submitted to church leadership. When a pattern emerges that would indicate a new direction verified by several of the members, that prophecy then is taken to the senior church leadership.

In all three churches prophecy is used for healing, edification, encouragement, and direction. They carefully weigh the prophecies they receive and pray over them before senior leadership makes an ultimate decision.

### **How Prophets and Prophecies Are Validated**

In responding to the question of how prophets are validated, each of the individuals interviewed said it had to do with the accuracy of their prophetic statements. When a word or prophecy is given that is accurate a strong validation occurs. All three churches trained and encouraged people to flow in the gift of prophecy. Pastoral leadership was identified as very important in encouraging members to deliver prophecy in the proper setting. With solid safeguards in place, an atmosphere was created that encouraged the prophet to risk speaking what the Lord had given them. This safe environment allowed those interviewed to bring forth a prophecy and know that it would be carefully weighed by others around them. This weighing proved to be another way of validating the prophecies that were delivered. When prophecy passes the test of the Spirit, Scripture, and human weighing, validation of the spiritual gift is obtained. The strongest validation remained the response of the individuals who received prophecy. Each of the individuals interviewed had received prophecy spoken into their lives. Realizing the power of a word of encouragement and hope helped to establish a format for the delivering of prophecy. While almost all of those interviewed would have indicated having made some mistakes in their prophecy, each of the individuals who saw

themselves flowing in the prophetic gift were strongly validated as they prayed over or gave information to individuals that they would have had no way of knowing except from God.

### **Accountability**

Accountability is one of the most important aspects of the prophetic gifting. In all three churches, accountability was held throughout the organization. In each of the three churches, the ultimate accountability was to pastoral staff and the senior pastor. In Trinity much of the prophecy received was given on Sunday morning allowing for immediate accountability to the pastor and senior leadership.

At Washington Crossing prophecies were usually given on Sunday evening during their Concerts of Prayer. Pastoral staff and prophetic leaders were available to give insight and accountability to the prophecies that were received during this time. Washington Crossing also had a small group of prophetic people that gathered known as “harp and bowl,” which is a gathering of worship leaders. Further evidence of the desire for accountability by those giving prophecy was presented when one respondent indicated nervousness about the flow of prophecy without senior leadership available to judge or correct.

Prophecies that would affect the direction of the church were gathered and given to the senior pastor and leadership in all three churches, again indicating the accountability rested with the senior pastor and staff. At Washington Crossing one respondent gave testimony to receiving a prophecy for the direction of the church. Concerned about timing issues and when to give the prophecy, she held on to that prophecy for over three years. She was ultimately advised to give that prophecy over to the pastor and senior leadership and let them make the decisions about the timing of it.

This becomes another example of how members of the church saw accountability at the pastoral level.

Exousia United Methodist Church, as a church plant, was started with prophetic ministry as a part of its spiritual gift mix. Accountability here rests with the senior pastor and directors of the prophetic team. Prophecies were taped to aid the one receiving prophecy and also as a teaching and correcting tool. In team prophecy, corrections were made on the spot if necessary. While tapes were used only at Exousia, they were an important part of the ministry there. Copies of the tapes were kept in the church office, and a second tape was given to the individual. When I asked about tapes at Trinity and Washington Crossing, both were concerned about confidentiality issues. At Exousia tapes were kept in confidence, but they added strength to the prophetic ministry. The person receiving a prophecy could take the tape with them and transcribe it which presented an opportunity for it to become clearer to them. Also, by the church maintaining a copy of the prophecy, if issues arose about the prophetic message given, the church had an accurate record about what had truly been said. The desire of Exousia was to be accurate and accountable to the words that God had given them.

All three churches would also place accountability for the prophecy delivered upon the shoulders of the prophet. Those interviewed recognized that the prophecies must first of all be judged against the Scriptures. The second area of personal accountability is that the prophecies to be delivered must also bear witness to the Holy Spirit within them. Those who had prophecy corrected saw the correction as a learning process and identified no personal problems with having prophecy corrected. They understood that this correction was done in love. Prophecy is from God and, as a result, getting it right is much more important than personal ownership.

While all three churches would put parameters around the kinds of prophecies given, I saw these parameters most clearly at Exousia and Washington Crossing. Because of the extensive training that both of these churches have provided, each respondent clearly understood that certain prophecies were not to be delivered. “Parking lot prophecies” about wealth, marrying, and babies were not to be given. These kinds of issues could be brought to the leadership for weighing, but great protection was taken not to become Christian fortunetellers. Subjects from both Exousia and Washington Crossing were emphatic on this point. The issue speaks strongly to both accountability and protocol. For accountability purposes prophecy was to be offered in the proper setting.

At Washington Crossing an incident occurred where several who flow in the prophetic gift had been to meetings in other churches. Seeing prophecy delivered in another fashion, they brought back some of the manifestations they had witnessed to Washington Crossing, creating a discomfort level in the way prophecy flowed during their Concerts of Prayer. The issue was immediately addressed by the senior pastor and order maintained. After interviewing one of the participants in the incident, her feeling was that the church needed to expand their vision in regards to the prophetic. These participants did, however, exhibit a willingness to submit to pastoral authority and wait for God’s timing to advance the manifestations that they had seen. I see, again, a strong illustration of the accountability within the life of the church.

All three churches had some individuals who would like to see less control on prophecy. These were participants who seemed to have a strong prophetic gift. Their concern was quenching the Spirit would not allow the free flowing of God’s word. In spite of these concerns, I witnessed a willingness to submit to the authority of the pastor. They recognized the importance of this submission in the life of the church and that it

created a safe environment for others to release a word from the Lord, giving proof that the prophet is in control of the timing, material, and delivery of the prophecy.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In analyzing the data, care must be given to the two forms of communication. Interaction during the interview held the dynamics of verbal communication. Once these were transcribed, the dynamic nature is lost and the information becomes more linear (True 166-73). While generalizability of qualitative research is at times difficult, my summary and conclusions are concerned with applying the gift of prophecy across the United Methodist denomination (Wiersma 211-12). To that extent, looking at what is being done in these churches is important so that implications for other United Methodist churches might be considered.

As I look at the three churches in this study, each of them has traveled a different path to arrive at approximately the same place. The three churches in the study utilize the Methodist structure and are strongly connected in the denomination. Each of these churches has been transitioning and, as such, has taken a slow and cautious approach to the use of prophecy. The desire of these churches to keep prophecy from becoming divisive is evident. Each of the three pastors interviewed was comfortable with the gift of prophecy. The three also demonstrated strong pastoral gifts that were also recognized by the members of their churches. Clear lines of authority were well established. Those lines of pastoral authority provided a sense of security in using the prophetic gift. All three churches seemed to provide a safe place where individuals could bring forth a word of prophecy that would be judged and dealt with carefully and tenderly. Because of the safety and structure that was evident, people felt much more comfortable in expressing a word they believed they had received from God. All three churches also provided solid training that again encouraged people to understand better the gift of prophecy and its



healthy utilization which I think is one of the important issues for the church. Early in my own life, I experienced a word from the Lord but had no framework in which to place it. Jacobs speaks of a similar experience as she recounts her early prayer life. During that prayer time, all she knew was that her prayers were different and people sought her out. Her prayers were prophetic, but she had no context in which to understand the prophetic flow. As a result, the gift became a problem to pastoral ministry (35-42). The understanding of the gift of prophecy is crucial if the church is to release people to bring a word from the Lord.

Beyond the issues of the pastoral giftedness, the training, and the atmosphere of safety, these three churches are vastly different. Trinity United Methodist had been an old-line former Evangelical United Brethren church. Largely evangelical, the pastor described the church as “respectful of the word, believed in being born again, and having a good social time.” He described the renewal of the church as happening “gradually and slowly, but constantly.” Scott Kelso has been the pastor of this church for thirty years now. In fact, it is the only church that he has pastored. Because he brought the charismatic experience to the church, when he arrived he became the catalyst for the transformation that would take place over the next thirty years. While longer pastorates are generally better, they would almost be imperative in transforming a church from evangelical to the utilization of all of the spiritual gifts.

Exousia United Methodist is a start-up church in the Detroit Annual Conference. With all of the difficulties of a church start, including the problems inherent in an inner-city church, this church could be a model for church plants. Bernadine Daniels brought extensive experience in the gift of prophecy to the church plant. This church was then founded on the utilization of all of the spiritual gifts. Having been trained under Bill

Hamon, Pastor Daniels brings a strong teaching and training ministry to the foundation of the church. Due to her gifting, she has been invited to do a number of ministries beyond the local church. She has been able to utilize these opportunities as training events in the development of her local prophetic team. The church is structured as a typical United Methodist church in regard to its administrative structure, but in regard to its ministry it is structured along teams. She has developed healing, prophetic, and worship teams that minister during and after the services. This team effect has allowed for the safety net where folks can exercise their gifts in a safe environment. It has also given leadership to a number of people who have been able to take their gifting to a deeper level. As people are attracted to this church, they come because the church already functions with the utilization of all of the gifts. The congregation is not viewed as a typical mainline church. She expressed that the conference has shown concern from time to time at the development of her ministry. I believe that not only will local churches need to be transformed but denominational structures will have to be more open for churches to flow freely in their gifting.

The Washington Crossing UMC represents the transition of a large church in a much shorter period of time. The road it has taken to renewal has been through the instrument of revival. About six years ago, the Holy Spirit fell upon over one hundred of its members, and revival and the use of the gifts began in earnest demonstrating a third way in which I believe transformation can take place. Scott McDermott has managed the church with a pastor's heart. Tight control has been maintained, but as revival took place it affected folks from all walks of the church. Due to the gentle way in which the revival was managed, division was averted and growth has been maintained. The church has grown from four hundred to over eight hundred members on Sunday morning. I believe

each of these churches is a case study for ways that transformation can take place. While the experiences of the subjects interviewed was fairly common, the approach of each of these churches was distinctively different emphasizing the fact that no set model of transformation is in place. The pivotal piece in all three churches, however, was the pastor. All of those interviewed saw their pastor as a strong and dynamic leader. I believe that the pastor must be open to the gifts and probably must be able to flow in the gifts to some extent in order for transformation truly to take place.

### **Prophecy Defined**

For the purposes of this paper, I have defined prophecy as knowledge God gives to the prophetically gifted individual for edification, information, and instruction, which could not have been known by natural means, thereby enhancing and promoting God's universal will. It is essentially receiving via thought, impression, dream, vision, Scripture, or other means the mind and heart of God and, at the appropriate time, communicating that information to God's people. Some have said that the priest goes before God on behalf of the people while the prophet goes before the people on behalf of God. My initial question in the interview was, "How do you define prophecy?" The answer almost universally was some form of a word or information from God for encouragement and edification. With the limits placed upon prophecy in these three churches, I realize that a large percentage of what is defined as prophecy were words of encouragement. What made them fit the definition of prophecy is that the words contained information that could not be known by any other means but from God.

Craig S. Keener talks about spiritual gifts. He sees the gift lists contained in Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians as ad hoc lists. Simply put, Paul mentions gifts that most nearly meet the needs of the people to whom he is writing. He mixes and matches

them freely. In fact some of the terms used may not have been familiar to the people who received his letter. Keener states, “Paul may have even spontaneously coined the names of some of these gifts for this Corinthian list for example word of knowledge” (114-27). What is important to note here is that authors on spiritual gifts define the gifts in slightly different ways. The revelatory gifts of word of knowledge, word of wisdom, prophecy, and tongues blend so closely together that separating them is often difficult. Paul himself may have had difficulty in delineating what he meant by each of these.

What people focused on when I asked them to define the gift of prophecy had more to do with how prophecy was used than what prophecy is. When I pressed and asked how they personally had received prophecy, they said at times it was a single word, or a dream, or a vision all leading to words of encouragement and edification. At times people gave a word and others in the group brought an interpretation or a definition. In these cases a word of knowledge, word of wisdom, and prophecy would run together, being used interchangeably.

As I interviewed the subjects and they began to tell me their stories of prophecies that had taken place in their lives and of prophecies they had given, the various spiritual gifts that have traditionally been separated clearly blended together. Cooke divides up the three aspects of prophecy as revelation, interpretation, and application (91). He states, “We need to start by understanding the difference between inspirational prophecy and revelational prophecy. Inspirational prophecy releases the joy of the Lord; brings peace into someone’s life; causes faith to rise and brings a reverence for God. All these things are happening at this level of inspirational prophecy” (91). What he is suggesting here is the difficulty at the inspirational level to distinguish between “spiritual stimulation and soulish sentimentality” (91). What was evident among the subjects I interviewed was a

well-defined understanding of inspirational prophecy. Stories were told of more directive prophecy, but those that were interviewed had no part in them. At Trinity, a man brought an extensive prophecy that changed the direction of the church. This man did not have the gift of prophecy and did not normally participate in prophecy but was given this word for the church. The subjects also mentioned occasional corrective words but because of protocol issues, corrective words were offered rarely and only by senior staff members. In all three churches, caution and carefulness surrounded the giving of prophecy.

The gift of prophecy, as it was used in these churches and as I have experienced it, generally involves a blending together of several gifts. Caution will then need to be used in helping churches come to good working definitions in order to advance in the prophetic flow. They will also need to be taught about how and when to share prophetic information. Some words need to be shared and immediacy is a part of them, while other words are meant to be held. Some words are well-defined, while other prophecy or words are only in part and, therefore, can easily be misinterpreted. The churches I interviewed had strong protocol issues around sharing and the application phase of prophecy which will be considered in more detail later.

In asking the subjects to define prophecy, a question was asked about how they would distinguish between Old and New Testament prophets. The vast majority of those interviewed found no difference between Old and New Testament prophets. When pressed on the issue of potential error, none of the subjects questioned that error could exist in New Testament prophecy. A general explanation by many was that the Old Testament prophecy was for a specific occasion and more rarely given and that the New Testament prophecy in the age of the Holy Spirit allows all persons to prophesy. Gentile states, "The words of both Old and New Testament prophets were not to be accepted

automatically as correct and above question” (189). Those interviewed understood that prophecy did not have the same strength as Scripture; however, their general understanding seemed to be that Old Testament prophets could make mistakes as well as New Testament prophets. To a person they understood the potential for mistakes in prophecy that they would deliver.

The use of prophecy can vary in the local church according to the type of prophecy given. Sullivant in Prophetic Etiquette sees New Testament prophecy on a graduated spectrum. Prophecy ranges from hearing God in personal conversation, which he thinks all Christians have experienced, through moving in simple inspirational prophecy, which also generally can be experienced by all believers, to the role of the prophetic ministry in regards to weighty matters. He concludes with the ministry of the prophet, which Sullivant considers to be a sovereign choice of God (186-87). Five of the individuals surveyed including two of the pastors believed they not only possess the gift but also have been given the prophetic office. Nineteen of those surveyed identified their gifting as the gift of prophecy while six would identify their gift as something else. Those who identified themselves with the gift of prophecy did so based upon the frequency with which they were able to deliver a message from God. Sullivant’s levels of prophecy were seen across the spectrum of those I interviewed. By far, however, the vast majority of experiences that were related dealt with the lowest level of inspirational prophecy, again, reflecting the training that these persons had received. Prophecy was most often defined by that which brings encouragement and edification and so was focused on inspirational prophecy. I suspect that under closer scrutiny, even fewer than the nineteen subjects who claimed the gift of prophecy would clearly have the gift. The issue can be somewhat a matter of semantics but only those with the office of prophet identified their abilities to

move regularly in the prophetic flow.

As I heard the testimonies of the people that I interviewed, the fact that prophecy had played a large part in bringing encouragement into their lives became clear. All those interviewed had received prophecy that had brought significant encouragement. The problem here is that the desire to be encouraged can lead to the soulish sentimentality of which Cooke speaks. People will often come seeking a word from the Lord in order to feel better but not understanding that personal prophecy is often conditional. If the person receiving the prophecy does not respond, it has no effect, which is a point the Old Testament prophets knew all too well. Higher levels of prophecy bring corrective words as well as words of direction, but these again must be weighed. John Arnott tells of receiving a prophecy from Benny Hinn to buy a certain piece of property. He bought the property only to find it was unusable due to zoning issues. The property was ultimately sold, but the lesson learned was a hard one. All prophecy must be weighed.

All three churches restrict the use of prophecy both in terms of who can prophesy and what topics can be discussed while giving prophecy. More weighty issues of prophecy to be received by individuals were given to team or pastoral staff for greater consideration. These restrictions are an excellent safeguard and fundamental if churches are to move into weightier matters of prophecy. I recently talked with a person who had a revival led by a pastor who was an evangelist/prophet. During the revival, he began to speak prophecies over individuals within the church. Some of them were accurate and others missed by a mile. Because of the setting, opportunities did not exist for the weighing or correction of the material before it was given, which I suspect is going to leave a lot of work to be done by the local staff in order to correct some of the wrongs. If prophecy is to be used correctly, it must be weighed and its conditional nature must be

understood. In the late sixties and early seventies, people often wondered why the Ohio State football team did not pass more. When Coach Woody Hayes was questioned about it, his response was that three things happen when passing the football, and two of them are not good (26). Prophecy can fall into that same category. Three things happen when prophecy is given. One of them is that it is accurate. The second thing is that the information is correct but the timing or the presentation is wrong, and the third thing is that it is totally incorrect. If prophecy is to be used to guide the church and move beyond the encouragement phase, solid guidelines must be put in place.

The second issue to be considered is the conditional nature of prophecy. If for instance an event is going to take place, there is no need for a prophetic word about the event to be given. The prophecy, however, may bring encouragement during a dark or difficult time to an individual. To know that a better day coming and to know that God is speaking directly into your life brings tremendous encouragement. Much of Daniel's prophecy was an encouragement to the nation of Israel. Individual prophecies of things that are going to take place bring encouragement when folks learn of the light at the end of the tunnel and see God actively using others to tell them about it.

Testing some of the prophecies given to me during interviews would have been helpful. At Exousia, one of the individuals interviewed had received prophecy on more than one occasion that she would soon be married to a Christian individual. She had even been given some descriptions about what he would look like. Follow-up to discover if that prophecy took place might be helpful. A second prophecy was given to the Exousia church that indicated the church would be moving within a short period of time to a larger facility. That prophecy again had been spoken on more than one occasion, and the church at large was anticipating that move. To follow up on that prophecy within the next



year to year and a half to see if, in fact, it did come to fruition would be interesting. How the use of prophecy affects the attitudes and actions of people is cause for further study. Trusting that God has spoken into one's life that something is going to take place has a profound effect upon one's actions and attitudes. When prophecy is weighed and is trusted, it brings hope even when the end result cannot be foreseen. The conditional nature of prophecy is in actively trusting God. When prophecy aligns itself with the Word, aligns itself with the individual spirit, and aligns itself with others who are weighing it, it can bring tremendous hope and expectation to those whom God chooses to speak.

The issue of validation was a very important for each of those interviewed. Risk is always involved when sharing information that can only have come from the Lord. A safe environment where prophetic people can be trained and allowed to practice on one another is very important. Of the three churches I saw, Exousia demonstrated the strongest training program, while many of the members of Washington Crossing church received training in ministries beyond the local church. Both Washington Crossing and Exousia had developed their own training material. Except for teachings in the gift of prophecy, Trinity did not seem to demonstrate any formal training.

When the prophet risks and shares information that could be received in no other fashion than coming directly from the Lord and they receive a positive response from the person to whom they are ministering, a tremendous sense of affirmation and validation comes as well. This additional sense of affirmation and validation allows the ministry to be strengthened. In various workshops I have attended, practice sessions were offered. In that safe environment the gift is expanded. Local churches seeking to flow in the prophetic gifts must provide training for the encouragement of their members. Another

strong teaching tool, although used in only one of the three churches, was a tape recorder. While issues of confidentiality are a concern, a tape of the prophecy given to the person receiving it will only strengthen the ministry. The opportunity to duplicate that tape as a way of training, helping, and supporting the prophet is another excellent tool. Without the opportunity of being able to hear again the prophecy and to transcribe it, important details can often be missed and some details can be misleading. Prophecies received, once transcribed, can read entirely differently than what was remembered when they were initially given. Often important details had been totally forgotten. This transcription becomes another strong instrument in validating the work the prophet does.

Because the pastoral staff in the three churches interviewed held the prophetic gift, others who utilized the gift were strongly supported and validated. The implications here cannot be overemphasized. If churches are to flow in the gift of prophecy, pastoral support is a must. Pastors must be grounded in the spiritual gifts and have had opportunities to witness where spiritual gifts are being utilized successfully. When a full range of the gifts begins to be used, regardless of the style of worship, strides will be made in breaking down the barriers that are often seen between those churches called charismatic and those that are not. The prophetic gifts were not only used during the morning worship service but, to a much greater extent, utilized in small group settings. The small group can be a safer place when all recognize that prophecies will be weighed there and also by pastoral leadership. Paul speaks extensively of the emphasis that must be placed upon the gifts being non-divisive and the importance of proper submission to authority in creating a holistic approach to the use of gifts. Each of the individuals surveyed had a strong and healthy respect for the pastoral leadership. Regardless of the gifts of the pastor, if this respect for pastoral authority is not in place, the potential for

division is evident. Imperative, then, is that prophets be held accountable. Cooke states, “If we can get prophetic ministries to work in a team, particularly with pastoral ministry, that is a brilliant combination” (106). The reason for team ministry is often that those who are best at receiving revelation are not necessarily the best at interpreting it. One of the individuals I interviewed considered her gift to be that of discernment. Just as a word of wisdom is often utilized in explaining a word of knowledge, so discernment is necessary in understanding the meaning of what’s being received. The prophet may often receive the right word, but the timing and the application may be wrong. The team approach in prophetic ministry also helps in discerning of spirits. The issue of the slave girl with Paul and Silas in Acts 16 is an excellent example. The girl was actually giving a prophecy and what she had to say was exactly true. Her statements, “These men are servants of the most high God, who are telling you the way to be saved” were exactly right, but given by the wrong spirit (Acts 16:17). As her prophecies went on day in and day out, Paul discerned the false spirit and cast it out of the girl. Just because the word given is essentially true does not mean it is given by the Spirit of the Lord. Team ministry and accountability through pastoral ministry help prevent this satanic masquerade.

Accountability, then, must first and foremost be to God’s Word. Anything that violates Scripture is naturally a wrong or false prophecy. Weighing the matter is also of crucial importance. Many prophecies can be given that are in line with Scripture and are essentially accurate but not appropriate for the present situation. These issues of timing and accountability speak, again, to the importance of knowing the people who are presenting prophecy. In each of the churches, people had to be known and become members before the microphone was open for them to prophesy. As ministries grow, opportunities exist for those who are trained and have proven themselves as accurate in

the presenting of prophecy to be a part of the weighing process. People who do not necessarily have the prophetic gift but who are strong in the faith and full of the Spirit can help in this area by weighing and discerning prophecies given. Paul encourages Timothy to “be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instructions. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine” (Acts 4:2-3). Prophets often march to the beat of another drum. Just as in the Old Testament, the prophets such as Jeremiah spoke God’s truth, but they would not necessarily have found themselves nominated for pastor of the year. The team approach allows for the pastor and prophet to present God’s message together. The pastor also has the opportunity to share the prophetic word during anointed preaching. In all three churches interviewed, the testimony was that the pastors would, from time to time, deviate and move into a prophetic word. One of the ways that prophets receive a word is through the Word. The Word of God is living and active and speaks into the present day. As it becomes alive in the preaching, it becomes alive in the prophetic. Pastors have the opportunity to preach prophetically as God quickens their hearts concerning the message they bring on any given day, strengthening the role of pastoral ministry when the prophetic gift may not be a primary gift of the pastor.

### **Charismatic Renewal**

Two final areas need to be looked at as I analyze this project in light of its application to the broader Methodist denomination. The first of these is the Pentecostal and charismatic experiences. As already stated in this study, the Pentecostal movement found in part its roots in Wesley and his doctrines of justification and sanctification leading to perfection. A second foundational block would come from those experiencing a higher life following the teachings of Charles G. Finney and others. “Both the

Wesleyan and higher-life advocates of the last century referred to this additional experience as the baptism in the Holy Spirit, although their definitions of the significance of that experience differed” (Burgess and McGee 2). As the twentieth-century dawned, Pentecostalism gained its start largely around the distinctive gift of tongues. While Pentecostals largely developed the denominational structure around their specific theological tenets, the charismatic movement following the teachings of Dennis Bennett in the early sixties began to be a trans-denominational movement of the Spirit. Both movements focused around full use of the gifts, and the evidence of tongues was a prominent factor. As I interviewed the thirty people in this study, I asked them when they had been saved and secondly when they had been baptized in the Spirit. A follow-up question related to the baptism of the Spirit was, “Did you have evidence by speaking in tongues?” All thirty identified a second work or baptism in the Spirit and all thirty identified the evidence of that baptism with speaking in tongues. When I pressed the tongues issue with some of the subjects and with the pastors, their understanding was that the gift of tongues was one more manifestation of the gift, which is the Holy Spirit. While they confessed to understanding that tongues was just one of the gifts, experientially in their lives it did not appear that it could be separated from what was termed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. While the whole study of tongues is for another day and another project, its significance here cannot be understated. If Paul in his selection of gifts is selecting them as I have indicated at random or ad hoc, his discussion in 1 Corinthians 14 connecting the signs of tongues and prophecy is interesting to note. He states, “Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for the unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for the believers, not the unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22). In Paul’s discussion of this issue, he states that the issue of tongues can drive the unbeliever away while the issue of prophecy can

convict and convert the unbeliever. The point is not to make a theological interpretation or discussion between the gifts of prophecy and tongues but to lift up the issue that tongues can be very divisive in the life of the church. I believe that the tongues issue is one that causes many United Methodist churches, and particularly their pastors, to be functionally cessationists. If prophecy is to find wider appeal throughout the United Methodist denomination, a theological bridge must be constructed to connect sanctification and moving on to perfection with the historical application of the term baptized in the Spirit and the present-day application of resulting gifts.

Another piece that must be examined is the tie that these prophetic churches hold to the denomination. The three churches I interviewed were all strongly connected in structure, thought, and deed to the United Methodist denomination. The people that I interviewed, however, came from a vastly different background. Seven of them were saved in a United Methodist church and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a United Methodist church. Two were saved in a Methodist church but received what they identified as a filling of the Spirit elsewhere, and four were saved elsewhere but received what they termed as the filling within the life of a United Methodist church. For these thirteen, Methodism played a role somewhere along their theological development. The remaining seventeen, however, received salvation, a baptism in the Spirit, and a certain amount of theological training somewhere else. Another significant demographic of the group is that only two of the thirty received salvation in a Pentecostal church while five received the baptism of the Spirit in the Pentecostal church. Taking the five that were baptized in the Spirit in a Pentecostal church and the seven that were baptized in the Methodist church, eighteen of those interviewed received a baptism of the Spirit in either a non-United Methodist denomination or a house church. The common factor for all of

those interviewed was a desire to be a part of what they termed a Spirit-filled church. I sensed very little tie to the denomination by any of those outside of the pastors I interviewed. What these individuals were seeking was a solid church with good structure that flowed in the gift of prophecy. The strength of pastoral leadership was what made the tie into United Methodism. Of the twenty-seven non-clergy respondents only two had been converted and baptized in the Spirit in their present-church (see Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1 Saved/Filled with the Spirit as United Methodist**

	<b>United Methodist</b>	<b>Non-United Methodist</b>
Saved	9	21
Filled with the Spirit	11	19

From the thirty interviewed, twenty-five fully came looking for a church that met their needs. All were looking for a church not only full of the Spirit but also stable. One of the great benefits of the United Methodist Church is its structure and stability. When this structure is anointed by the Spirit, it provides a whole and safe environment for people to utilize their gifts.

The importance of church structure can be seen in Wesley's interaction with the French prophets. The French prophets were a Spirit-anointed group that emerged in France in the early 1600s. They were, however, to run into the political machinery that had fueled the religious wars some years previously. When Louis XIV took the throne, he revoked the edict of Nantes in 1685. Through persecution and imprisonment, the Protestant movement of the French prophets was all but obliterated. Leadership either left

the country or was imprisoned and tortured. What followed was, in essence, a leaderless group of prophets who lived experientially. The theological underpinning and structure of the church and church leadership was obliterated. The remnants of this group were those with whom Wesley had contact. A great deal of misuse of prophecy occurred within the group and it ultimately went out of existence for lack of leadership and structure (Martin 2-13).

The importance of the history lesson is that for those who came through the charismatic experience, their teaching and baptism in the Spirit was done in house churches and in small groups. For many, their gift was not accepted within the church or denomination of which they were a part. Without sound teaching, they were left to wander and often found themselves in difficult, unstructured, small house churches. Even those with Pentecostal denominational ties found structure to be a problem. Ten reported excesses and difficulties within the lives of former churches. When sound biblical teaching is taken away and theology subservient to experience, excesses abound. I saw in those interviewed a desire for a healthy structure that allowed them the protection to practice the gifts God was laying on their heart. While some of them chafed against the tight controls implemented in the three churches, they were appreciative of the structure that was in place. As theological reflection in the United Methodist Church is done first and foremost through the lens of Scripture and then in relation to experience, tradition, and reason, United Methodists have an excellent opportunity to bring together the best of the Pentecostal and charismatic experiences within an accepting structure. While understood that the quadrilateral is not unilateral, it nevertheless offers an umbrella that provides this structure for the experience of all of the spiritual gifts:

When we speak of experience as an authority for theology, we refer not just to the religious experience of individuals but also to the experience of



the community of faith collectively. Private revelatory experiences may prove edifying, but they can claim normative status in the interpretation of scripture only insofar as they are received and validated in the wider experience of the community. (Hays 210-11)

I do not believe these people to whom God has given the gift of prophecy are finding their way into receptive United Methodist churches by mere chance. The next question is how we are raising up the next generation. The three churches I interviewed were all doing an excellent job of allowing the flow of the gifts into their children and youth. Seen in its healthy context, this openness to the gifts can only strengthen the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church.

Lynley Allan, who is the associate pastor at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, sees the opportunity to use prophecy in evangelistic form. Led by the Holy Spirit through a variety of circumstances, Allan began to take her small cell group to bookstores and malls to begin to have prophetic conversations with people. In spite of some difficulties and possibly some inaccurate prophecies, many people were open to prayer being offered on their behalf. Allan says, “I discovered something. People want you to pray for them” (5). As prophecy matures in the United Methodist Church, it may well develop into the outreach evangelistic tool Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 14.

### **Unexpected Findings**

During the study a number of areas fell into the category of unexpected findings. The first of these pertained to protocol issues and the tight control of prophecy by the church leadership. While I expected to find rules for the handling of prophecy, I was surprised at the tight control exerted by these various churches. Prophecy was seen as an extension of the ministry of the church and as such represented the church as a whole. The desire to protect the church and its people was an overriding factor in managing how prophecy was used. Because of the very nature of prophecy, folks who would misuse it

can be drawn into it. Churches that flow in the prophetic will find themselves drawing people who want a stronger experiential worship service. One pastor described this finding in these terms: “If you turn the light on you tend to draw the bugs.” By providing training, a safe environment, and oversight control, prophecy was protected in the life of these churches.

A second unexpected finding was that all of those interviewed reported a baptism in the spirit with evidences of speaking in tongues. While I would expect that this gift would be heavily utilized in the life of these churches, I was surprised to find it so universal. As I probed this issue, I found evidence of people who had given prophecies who had not had a baptism in the Spirit experience, but of those interviewed who regularly flowed in the prophetic all had experienced the baptism of the Spirit. While several of those interviewed seldom used tongues, particularly in their prayer life, they nonetheless identified with what seemed to be for them a universal experience.

A third area of surprise was to find how knowledgeable those interviewed were. This group was handpicked by the pastors, so I would have expected them to have a reasonable degree of understanding, yet I found them, as an overall group, to be solid in their theology. I would anticipate that this knowledge had much to do with the training that was given to those using prophecy and their desire to receive training as they recognized their gifts.

A final area I found to be somewhat unexpected was the number of people available for this project. My assumption as I approached the project was that I would find two or three in each church that would have the gift and then I would need to draw from the church body as a whole to find folks who had simply witnessed prophecy being given but had not experienced it in their life. All thirty of the people I interviewed had not

only witnessed prophecy or given prophecy, but if they did not consider prophecy a part of their life, they had at least received or given a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom. All of the individuals had been affected in some fashion by the prophetic gifts. While these churches were active in the utilization of this gift so that I might have expected their lives to have been affected by prophecy, I was, again, surprised by the number of individuals who utilized this gift and by the ways in which it was utilized. All of those interviewed saw the gift as one for edification and the building up of the body and as such saw this gift for the strengthening of the church.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I perceive four limitations in this study. The first pertains to the selection of the participants. While the original plan was to use the entire active congregation from which to draw, I quickly realized that the selection process could be done more efficiently if accomplished by the local pastors. Nevertheless, this selection by the pastors would allow them to select individuals for the study who would reflect favorably upon the church and upon prophecy as a whole. Not realizing the number of subjects who were utilizing the prophetic gift, I would change the selection procedure if I were to redo the study. Interviewing the pastor and those who have the prophetic gift and then selecting 50 percent of the respondents randomly from the congregation would have allowed for a more widespread understanding of how the congregation sees prophecy functioning.

A second area of limitation has to do with the churches I selected. Having identified these churches through the Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, the churches that were recommended were strong churches with effective leadership. While the project was to find churches where the gift of prophecy was being effectively pastored and utilized, these churches, I believe, were the cream of the crop. Interviewing a church that has an

active prophetic ministry but has just gone through a pastoral change to see how pastoral leadership deals with an active prophetic congregation would be interesting.

Another area of limitation concerns my own involvement in the interview process. While the questionnaire was pretested and transcribed to ensure more accuracy during the interviews, I nevertheless found myself, during the interviews, becoming actively involved. By involved I mean as I searched to discover who these people were and how they functioned, I found, at times, the interviews strayed far from the main topic. While this additional conversation added greatly to the overall understanding, I found a lack of hardcore scientific data. As I read through over three hundred pages of transcribed interviews, I was able to gain a sense of where the group was as a whole, but as a researcher, I became a significant part of the instrumentation. A natural limitation of qualitative research is that duplication of the style of interviewing that I utilized may be difficult.

A final area of limitation relates to the narrowness of the project. While churches were selected in three different United Methodist annual conferences and a good cross-section of subjects was interviewed, much is still to be discovered about how the gift of prophecy is recognized in light of the United Methodist denomination. Further areas of study would be to interview bishops or even members of the council of bishops to gain a broader interpretation of the denomination's understanding of prophecy.

### **Areas for Further Study**

As I did the analysis on this project, a number of thoughts came in regard to future study. One of those is how to expand training in the prophetic. A study of United Methodist seminaries would be in order to try to get a handle on their understanding of the spiritual gifts and how they are attempting to implement them into the life of

seminary students.

A second area I think needs further attention is the rework of the 1972 Guidelines: The United Methodist Church and the Charismatic Movement. A great deal of thought went into the Guidelines at the time of the charismatic explosion that took place during the late sixties and early seventies, but the charismatic movement has lost a sense of steam. The denomination has moved in several other directions since then and now in the twenty-first century has greater opportunity for integration of the spiritual gifts into the total life of many of the United Methodist churches. After spending some time in this project, I think for the denomination as a whole to publish some statements about spiritual gifts and its position on the spiritual gifts is important.

Another area of study is to understand how the gifts are viewed in evangelical churches where the gift is not a part of the everyday functioning. To interview strong evangelical churches that do not have an ongoing or active prophetic ministry in an attempt to discover exactly what is available and what is being used would be useful information as one looks towards transformation.

A final area of study that I think could be useful would be how third wave churches, whether they are denominational or independent, could network together. Certainly Aldersgate Renewal becomes a place for networking within the life of United Methodists, but one has to wonder how some connected networking can take place and training transplanted from one church to another. This kind of information is vital in an itinerant system and would give a better understanding of the gift mix in the life of churches where pastors are moved.

### **A Vision for Transformation**

Prophecy as a means of communicating God's heart to the people has been

around since the beginning of Scripture. Throughout the ages, times of high prophetic activity have been recorded as well as times when prophetic activity was seldom evident. In the post-apostolic era, the same could be said of revivals. Great sweeping revivals have occurred in addition to times of relatively little revivalist activity. Prophetic activity is currently escalating. As I documented, in the restoration of the fivefold ministry from Ephesians, the eighties were considered a time of great expansion in the prophetic gifts as the nineties were considered an expansion in the apostolic. As I have seen demonstrated in these three churches, people are coming from a variety of theological walks into mainline denominations and specifically the United Methodist Church bringing with them their gifts and embracing the structure of the church. United Methodist churches have now experienced over thirty years of steady decline. If what I have seen in the three churches of this study could be replicated to some small extent across the denomination real hope exists that the denomination will find revival in the embracing of all of the gifts and a resulting increase in vibrancy.

As a natural part of Wesleyan history, the denomination must now begin to look at ways that transformation can begin to take place. The easiest way would be with new church plants. Exousia United Methodist Church models that concept. Bringing the team concept approach to the structure of United Methodism, an inner-city mission church is having a profound ministry. Only time will indicate what kind of numerical growth might be achieved, but the vibrancy of the church is without question. Starting with a model is always easier than transforming an existing model. I believe the ramifications presented here are evident for those in the church growth industry. Various United Methodist conferences have done church plants with greater or lesser success. A church plant with a prophetic pastor and a prophetic team has the opportunity to achieve great results.

Regardless of style of worship or physical location, the utilization of prophetic teams can greatly enhance the speaking of God's heart and mind in giving direction to new church plants. In preparing people for these pulpits, the training and exposure provided by seminaries must be reevaluated. I have always been a United Methodist. Attending Ashland Seminary, I went through their Emerge Counseling Program led by Richard Dobbins, who was a prominent Assembly of God pastor. In the two years I attended the counseling program I was taught by Pentecostal professors and sat in a class of students that were over 50 percent from Pentecostal backgrounds. My grandparents were foundational families in establishing the Assembly of God church in their hometown. In spite of my relationship with Pentecostals, in the midst of my ministry, I had absolutely no concept of how the gifts worked. The testimony of many of the people I interviewed was familiar to me as they talked about how the Spirit would give them direction and yet they had no idea what the gift of prophecy was or how it functioned. I remember clearly when Dr. Stephen Seamands, one of my professors in this Doctor of Ministry program encouraged me to do a paper for his class on the gift of prophecy, and yet I had no idea what prophecy was all about. I have come to understand that my experiences are not unique. What I had received in my seminary education was solid evangelical teaching. The Emerge Ministry training, again, was based upon solid evangelical teaching. My understanding of this gift somehow stayed locked within standard United Methodist teaching. Any openness I had to the gifts was locked in ignorance.

Many solid teaching ministries are available today. I have attended workshops with Wagner in Colorado, with Hamon in Florida, and with the Airport Christian Fellowship in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and have had excellent training in all of those places. Wagner's invitation for John Wimber to teach on the campus of Fuller

Theological Seminary created a tremendous flap, but the classes that Wimber taught were some of the highest attended in the seminary. Students received hands-on experience with a much broader range of the gifts. If transformation is to take place, the utilization of the full range of gifts will be an important part of that change.

A third piece of the transformation will be to bring support through prophetic teams. One of the prized possessions in the church today is the solid worship leader. The change in the worship scene, particularly in the United Methodist Church, makes worship leaders a vital part of team ministry. Prophetic leaders and prophetic teams could also be made a vital part of congregations. I believe that if gift inventories were given in strong churches, several people would be found to score high on the prophetic gifts. As my personal antenna has gone up in regard to the issues of the gift of prophecy, I have found people who flow in this gift within churches who are unaware that it is actually a spiritual gift. These people could then be developed as they are already in the life of that church and, in cooperation with the pastor, develop prophetic teams.

A fourth way that transformation can begin to take place is with a multi-church approach. Washington Crossing is attempting to become a regional training church. Bringing in outside resources and speakers and inviting churches around them to come in has helped to spread the message of the spiritual growth in that church. Like any large church with a great deal of activity, other churches are eager to know the secret of their success. Across their annual conference they have taken the opportunity to share with other United Methodist churches what is happening in their prophetic ministries. These churches can also be resource churches to develop prophetic training. Those at Washington Crossing who are a part of the prophetic team must take their Prophecy 101 course. They could easily invite others to be a part of that training as they prepare them



for service in their own local church. Churches that offer training are being developed not only in United Methodism but in many other denominations. Wagner has labeled a number of these churches as New Apostolic churches. George G. Hunter, III indicates he has trouble with this concept. His difficulty seems to range in defining the office of apostle. He states, “I cannot support the movement’s obsession to restore the office of prophet for the church today” (16). He later states, “I cannot support the movement’s implied definition of an apostle as a leader who exercises command authority over one or more churches” (17). The semantics in the office of apostle are, I believe, similar to the semantics surrounding the gift and the office of prophecy. In fact, the United Methodist Church elects bishops who serve over numbers of churches which seems representative of the nature of an apostolic office. In my opinion, identifying pastors with the apostolic gifting rather than focusing on political correctness would be a better method to choosing these leaders. I believe that in transforming so many small churches regional connections based on theology rather than geography can be extremely helpful. Wagner in his book Changing Church deals extensively with the office of apostle and takes it in a new direction.

A fifth area that cannot be overlooked is the Aldersgate Renewal Ministries. This is an officially sanctioned ministry of the United Methodist Church for renewal in the Holy Spirit. Through conferences and workshops, they are active in helping to promote the gifts of the Spirit. I believe the work of this group needs to be expanded. I obtained the names of churches for this project through the networking of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries but my search for additional help from that group seemed to fall on deaf ears. Several phone calls and e-mails received no response. If someone with the heightened interest that I have was unable to gain much information, I wonder how effective the

group is for the average person in the pew. I confess little knowledge of the group's working but believe because of their official office in the United Methodist Church they are poised to help significantly in the transformation of congregations. I look forward to attempting to find more about this organization in the near future.

None of these suggestions for renewal are new or earthshaking. I know that many of the things suggested are taking place in ways across the denomination. As the Spirit continues to move in these days, small steps will be taken to help embrace the full range of the gifts. This study has broadened my vision not only of the gifts but of what God is doing in the midst of the United Methodist denomination. I am excited about the potential for transformation. I am also excited that churches flowing in the full range of the gifts including the prophetic will raise up a generation of children that will gain their experience in United Methodist churches and be prepared as workers in the field where the harvest is ripe.

**APPENDIX A**  
**PARTICIPANT DATA FORM**

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Educational background:

Number of years Christian:

Church/Denominational background:

Number of years United Methodist:

Number of years in this church:

Present offices held:

What are your Spiritual gifts?

Do you have gift of prophecy?

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How would you define the gift of prophecy?

Probe: What is the purpose of this gift?

How does the present-day prophet/prophecy compare with the Old Testament prophet prophecy?

What are some differences you observe in individuals demonstrating this gift?

What are some forms or shapes that you have seen prophecy take? (Dreams or Visions)

2. How do prophets/prophecy function in your church?

Probe: Does your church have a recognized standard procedure?

Would they be given in Sunday service?

Are there small group settings where prophecy is given?

Are individuals open to sharing prophecy individually?

Is prophecy always shared in a group setting, or is some prophecy given individually?

If so, how are these prophecies shared with the larger body?

3. How are/is prophets/prophecy validated?

Probe: How are spiritual gifts recognized and their use promoted?

What about nonmembers delivering prophecy? (those who may be visiting)

Is there specific training given with regard to prophecy?

4. How are prophets held accountable?

Probe: Tell me how you understand the church structure in regards to prophecy.

How long have you functioned with the prophetic gift?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **FOLLOW-UP LETTER**

My name is Keith Bohley and we talked last week about using your church as part of my D. Min. project. The purpose of this project is to explore how the gift of prophecy functions in the United Methodist churches where it is already recognized and affirmed. As we talked, I would like to interview ten people from your church who have: 1. Given prophecy, 2. Received prophecy or a word of knowledge, 3. Witnessed prophetic activity. If there were not ten in the first two categories, I would like to list those who are active in the church and who would qualify for the third. Names, then, can be drawn from random until there are ten to interview. I am going to try to do this in two days.

Can we identify ten people and somehow set them up in one hour blocks with 30 minutes in between? I am trying for four to five on Friday and five to six on Saturday. I know that a lot depends on your people and the response they are willing to give. All interviews are confidential. I would like permission to use the interview without name in my research project. I recognize that setting up these interviews places some burden on you. I think, however, your people would respond better to you than to a stranger on the phone. I would like to conduct the interviews at the church in a classroom or other suitable area. I include a brief bio to help you understand who I am.

I am 56 years old and have been a pastor in east Ohio for twenty-five years. The project is through Asbury Seminary. Dr. Steve Seamands is my advisor and Dr. Robert Tuttle is my second reader. By giving you these names, I hope to identify that I am not out in left field. Working with Dr. Seamands, I began to realize that the gift of prophecy was functioning in my life. I have attended prophetic conferences with C. Peter Wagner and Dr. Bill Hamon. This project has been a growing experience, since this gift is not part of

the gift mix in the churches I have served. I believe this gift is one God intends to expand within UMC and I am eager to see how it works within our system.

The four main questions in the interview are:

1. How would you define the gift of prophecy?
2. How do prophets function within your church?
3. How are prophets validated?
4. How are prophets held accountable?

My hope is to identify the common traits in three churches with a total of thirty interviews. Again, I appreciate your help and the help of your people in this project. As a pastor I know your time is a premium. Let me know what else you need from me.

Looking forward to working with you,

Keith

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